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THE CORNER OF HARLEY STREET

BEING SOME FAMILIAR CORRESPONDENCE OF PETER HARDING. M.D.

LONDON
CONSTABLE & CO LTD.
1914

First Edition . . January 1911
Reprinted . . . . May 1911
" . . . . July 1911
" . . . . August 1911
" . . . . October 1911
" . . . . November 1911
" . . . . October 1912
" . . . . January 1913
" . . . . November 1913
" . . . . March 1914

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I		
To Robert Lynn, M.R.C.S., Applebrook, Devon . . .	March 4th	9
II		
To Horace Harding, Trinity College, Cambridge . .	March 11th	20
III		
To Miss Josephine Summers, The Cottage, Potham, Beds . .	March 14th	32
IV		
To Colonel R. F. Morris, C.B., 7th Division, Meerut, India . .	March 15th	34
V		
To Hugh Pontrex, Villa Rosa, Mentone . .	March 23rd	45
VI		
To Miss Sarah Harding, The Orphanage, Little Blessington, Dorset	March 31st	55
VII		
To Harry Carthew, Trenant Hotel, Leeds . . .	April 8th	66

VIII

To John Summers, M.B.,
At Actonhurst, Granville Road, PAGE
Bristol . . . . . April 12th 71

IX

To Harry Carthew,
Trenant Hotel, Leeds . . April 15th 78

X

To the Rev. Bruce Harding,
S. Peter's College, Morecambe Bay April 20th 79

XI

To Miss Josephine Summers,
The Cottage, Potham, Beds . . April 22nd 87

XII

To Tom Harding,
c/o the Rev. Arthur Jakes, Rugby . April 24th 88

XIII

To Hugh Pontrex,
Villa Rosa, Mentone . . . May 3rd 95

XIV

To Miss Molly Harding,
91B, Harley Street, W. . . May 6th 109

XV

To Miss Josephine Summers,
The Cottage, Potham, Beds . . May 16th 116

XVI

To Lady Wroxton,
The Manor House, Stoke Magna,
Oxon . . . . . May 23rd PAGE 118

XVII

To Miss Sarah Harding,
The Orphanage, Little Blessington,
Dorset . . . . . June 7th 127

XVIII

To Robert Lynn, M.R.C.S.,
Applebrook, Devon . . . June 25th 151

XIX

To Hugh Pontrex,
Hotel Montana, Biarritz . . July 16th 157

XX

To Horace Harding,
c/o Major Alec Cameron, Glen
Bruisk, Sutherland, N.B. . . Aug. 17th 166

XXI

To Miss Josephine Summers,
The Cottage, Potham, Beds . . Aug. 25th 177

XXII

To Reginald Pole,
S.Y. Nautilus, Harwich . . Aug. 30th 179

XXIII

To Miss Sarah Harding,
The Orphanage, Little Blessington,
Dorset . . . . . Sept. 6th 195

XXIV

To the Rev. Bruce Harding, PAGE
S. Peter's College, Morecambe Bay Sept. 14th 202

XXV

To Hugh Pontrex,
Villa Rosa, Mentone . . . Oct. 3rd 219

XXVI

To John Summers, M.B.,
c/o the Rev. W. B. La Touche,
High Barn, Winchester . . Oct. 18th 231

XXVII

To Miss Sarah Harding,
The Orphanage, Little Blessington,
Dorset . . . . . Nov. 7th 242

XXVIII

To Miss Josephine Summers,
The Cottage, Potham, Beds . . Nov. 26th 249

XXXIX

To the Rev. Bruce Harding,
S. Peter's College, Morecambe Bay Dec. 2nd 251

XXX

To Hugh Pontrex,
Villa Rosa, Mentone . . . Dec. 25th 255

The Corner of Harley Street

I

To Robert Lynn, M.R.C.S., Applebrook, Devon.

91B, HARLEY STREET, W.,
March 4, 1910.

MY DEAR BOB,

Your letter of this morning, like the cream that it was, rose naturally to the surface of the little pile of correspondence that awaited me on the breakfast-table; and if I didn't read it then, and am only answering it now, in front of my dressing-room fire, there are more reasons than one for this. You might even detect a little pathos, perhaps, in the chief of these. For I can't help feeling that a younger man—myself, for example, twenty years ago—would have been into it before you could say scalpel, snatching his joy as one of your own parr will take a Wickham on a clear pool before the half-pounder beside him has even decided to inspect it. And if I have not done this, if I have learned the better way, the art of lingering, the value of the "bou-

quet," well, there's a rather forlorn piece of scalp in the opposite looking-glass to tell me the reason why.

So you see that I didn't rush headlong at your letter, tearing it open with a feverish, if mature, forefinger. I even ignored the twinkle in my wife's eye, and the more impertinent expression that Miss Molly was permitting to rest upon her usually calm features.

"Another lump, my pet," was all I said, and stirred my coffee with that inscrutable calm so justly associated with Destiny, Wisdom, and the Consulting Physician.

"He's pretending not to be excited," explained Miss Molly to a college friend across the table; and Claire, all chestnut mop and black-stockinged legs (and convalescent, by the way, from the mumps), gurgled suddenly over her Henty when she ought by rights to have been completely breathless.

Through the open window a pleasant breeze stirred lazily across the table, decked with its stolen sweets from our own and our neighbours' hyacinths. And in a welcome sunshine the windows of Sir Jeremy's consulting-room beamed as merrily as their owner's eyes.

"And not even one spark of enthusiasm," pro-

ceeded Molly. "Oh, who would have a mere physician for a parent?"

"For the elderly," I told her, "excitement is to be deprecated. Now if I were twenty-four, perhaps——"

"Twenty-three," put in Molly, adding, with very great distinctness, "to-morrow."

"And that reminds me," murmured Claire from her sofa under the window.

So I opened the other envelopes first, those that contained the bills, the appointments, the invitations, and the unpleasant letters, just as a wise man should, who is at his best, and realizes it, tubbed and shaved and over his breakfast bacon. And since Molly and her friend appeared to have interrupted themselves in the midst of some earnest political discussion, I begged them to resume this. For in making the breakfast-table their judgment-bar they were setting an example, as I reminded them, that the world would do well to follow. Breakfast-table verdicts, breakfast-table sermons, breakfast-table laws, for true and kindly sanity they might be safely backed, I observed, against any product of the midnight oil that has emerged from the brain of man—including even woman as produced by Newnham; or so, at any rate, thought a middle-

aged physician whose opinions were dear to me. Only, of course, it would have to be a well-furnished table; and the marmalade, if possible, should have been made at home.

"You had better just *glance* at it though, hadn't you?" asked Esther—dear, wise Esther—from her throne behind the urn; after which there was quite obviously nothing else to be done. Applebrook—glorious postmark—it had already begun to weave its magic for me as I slipped a knife into the comfortable envelope, and ran a well-mastered eye over its contents.

"Nothing of importance," I announced; "only fish."

"*Only* fish," scoffed Molly, well into her third muffin.

And yet, though I have not actually read it till just now—my sacred ten minutes before the dinner-gong summons me downstairs—your letter has really followed me all day, even as Applebrook itself will follow a returning angler down the evening moor, and ripple through his after-supper dreams. It has blessed me, and made a dull day bright (for the sun began to sulk again at noon), and the more so because my wisdom kept it at a distance until just now. Applebrook—as I emerged from the District Railway into

that faint but inexorable smell of burnt coffee and human unwashedness which broods over Whitechapel Road, the extra bulge in my breast-pocket reminded me suddenly of wind-blown gorse and all the hard-bitten, sunburnt heath that stands for Dartmoor. My step quickened. I entered the hospital gates with a jauntier tread, and could have sworn that a silver trout shot spectrally round the corner in front of me. A poor presage for my lucidity in the afternoon march round the wards, I can hear you murmur. But you are wrong there. For, on the contrary, the points of my discourse made their bows to my memory with unwonted briskness; and I contrived, I think, to keep the notebook-pencils pretty busy.

Yet the afternoon did contain one of those disquieting surprises that used at one time to seem so catastrophic, and now appear only too wonderfully uncommon. For some weeks past I have had a poor fellow in one of my beds, a cheerful soul, for all he knew himself to be treading a downhill road. His condition, rather an obscure one, and in any event incurable, might have represented one of two causes. Week by week, to a respectful and intelligent body of students, I have demonstrated the signs and symp-

toms of this patient, and proved to them how, on the whole, they must be taken to indicate B—shall we say ?—as the root of the mischief. And now to-day, before an expectant gathering, the uncompromising knife of the pathologist in the post-mortem room has revealed the precisely opposite. It was A all the time, and there was nothing for it but to accept defeat, and retire strategically in as good an order as might be. There was, at any rate, the consolation that the mistake could not have affected the unhappy issue of the malady. It was merely a sort of academic pride that was to suffer ; and I suppose it is only an acquired familiarity with death that could have made so small a personal disaster even imaginable —for I don't think it ever really became actual—under its great shadow. So I made my retreat—in fair order, I believe, with baggage intact and a minimum of casualties. Nevertheless I caught young Martyn, the wing three, you know—what wouldn't I have given for his swerve thirty years ago !—smiling significantly across at your son, who was very tactfully endeavouring to appear oblivious. And it was Applebrook that fortified my powers of forgiveness—Applebrook rippling peacefully over its immemorial granite.

And so there's plenty of water, is there, and

the colour has been just right? And you have already been into a pounder, and landed him too. That's good, for though we miss a lot of pounders in Applebrook—"a pound, sir, if it weighed an ounce, and took half the cast away with it"—we seldom land one. And am I game to come down on May 1st as usual?

A day-dream, or dusk-dream, has been interrupted here—I might have prophesied it—by one of those earnest, cadaverous persons whose pride it is that they have never taken—never felt the need of it, they usually add—a holiday in their lives.

"Not for thirty-five years, sir," said this latest specimen to me just now, rubbing his hands with counting-house pride.

"God help you," I replied, which took him aback a little, and was not, I admit, a tactful welcome to a prospective two guineas. But then, you see, he had fetched me back from a dusk-dream.

"Does that mean *you* can't?" he inquired a little acidly. And really I should not have been quite so abrupt with him, for his confession gave me the right cue to his treatment. A holiday, in fact, was all that he needed, though I doubted his ability to use one. So I assumed

my heaviest manner, as one must when it is to be unaccompanied by an expensive prescription.

"If you don't take one," I proceeded to tell him, "though you will probably survive with the aid of iron, arsenic, and an occasional Seidlitz powder, you will become eventually like those sorrowful civil servants that may be met at almost any time in Somerset House or the General Post Office. They have been pensioned for months, but there they are, unable to inter themselves decently among the mashies and geraniums of Wimbledon and Weybridge, haunting their former desks, poor forlorn creatures, whose one bond of life has been severed—a torture to themselves and their successors."

While I was taking breath after this rather impressive harangue, he stared at me gloomily.

"It has always," he said, "been my one great desire to die in harness."

After congratulating him on the possession of so modest, if somewhat cheerless, an ambition, I asked him why he had come to see me. A physician, to a man with such a goal, seemed, on the face of it, something of a superfluity. But I learned that there was a wife at home, poor soul. And it was her doctor, he said, who had recommended this visit.

"And I may tell you," he added, "that your opinion coincides with theirs." He handed me his two guineas. "Where shall I go?" he asked.

By now of course I could see that my advice was going to be useless; but there was no better alternative.

"Have you any hobbies?" I inquired. But he shook his head. No; he had never had time for hobbies. And by to-morrow afternoon he will be reading his *Financial News* on Brighton Pier, and wondering when he can decently return.

. . . . . .

But the dressing-gong has sounded already, and the embers in my fire are reddening into darkness. Outside, the wheels of a myriad motor-cars and carriages pass ceaselessly, and repass; and from beyond and beneath them, through the open window, comes the roar of London. I believe you sigh for it sometimes, don't you, down there among your moorland silences? Give me three weeks of it a year, and, as far as I am concerned, you might monopolise the orchestra for the other forty-nine. I don't particularly want my dinner, and I am still less inclined to talk amiably with the two dull, but worthy, guests—may the gods of hospitality forgive me—who are to sit at our

board to-night. With the tired girl-poet, I am praying instead ;

> God, for the little streams that tumble as they run.

For there are times when I think that the best thing about Harley Street is that there are exactly twelve ways out of it, and this, I think, is one of them.

If to-morrow now were only the 1st of May, and that doorstep of mine opened into Paddington, cheeriest of railway stations. By the way, somebody ought to write an essay on the Personality of Railway Stations. Liverpool Street, for example, smokes cheap cigarettes, and lives at Walthamstow—does its baggage up with string, and takes dribbly children to Clacton-on-Sea. And Paddington is a sun-tanned country squire, riding a good thirteen stone, and with an eye for an apple. His luggage is of a well-ripened leather, and he is a bit lavish with his tips.

. . . . . .

But, alas, my door merely opens to admit the timid nose of a new maid who announces the arrival of the visitors. Dressing-gowns must be shed, and tails donned. I am grasping your hairy brown hand. Can you feel it ?

"Lucky dog," I am saying to you, "the wind's up-stream, and the trout are hungry, and for all your scattered practice you can still nip down for one perfect hour to Marleigh Pool—still feel your rod-point bending to some heaven-sent troutling of the true fighting stock." Will I come? Won't I! And till then I can merely remain London-bound.

Your envious old friend,

P. H.

II

To Horace Harding, Trinity College, Cambridge.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
March 11, 1910.

MY DEAR HORACE,

Casting a remorseful eye at the date upon your letter, I perceive that it is already almost a week since I resolved to sit down, and answer it immediately; and the postscript that follows "your aff. son H." gazes at me with a rebuking stare, as if to remind me how very far I have been from bucking up, as you so tactfully suggested, and flooring the problem with which you have presented me. And yet you mustn't suppose that I have been altogether too careless or too busy to deal with it as you wished. On the other hand, I have been dodging it round the ring of everyday happenings ever since I first beheld it eyeing me beneath the Trinity crest. For the fact of the matter is, my dear Horace, that your revered Daddy has all along been more than doubtful about his ability to stretch the fellow on the carpet. And now, at the end of a

week's somewhat cowardly—footwork, shall we call it?—he has decided to crawl under the ropes, and make room for a lustier substitute.

Shall you become a doctor? Well, I'm afraid, after all, that you must tackle the question for yourself. As an American patient, with a doubtful liver, observed to me this morning, the problem is right up against you; and nobody else can defeat it in your stead. The thought of this has cheered me so amazingly that from now onwards you may safely imagine, I think, an almost contented physician, sitting plumply in a front stall, smiling at the fight over contemplative finger-tips, and merely tendering, between the rounds, some well-worn pieces of ring-side advice.

And so the peaks are challenging you, eh? The wig, the gaiters, the gold *pince-nez*, and the bedside manner, they have risen up to bid you choose your future path. For twenty-two years, you tell me, you haven't greatly disturbed yourself about these things. You have accepted parental orders: you have taken, in consequence, a respectable, if not distinguished, degree in classics; you have mastered enough science to rob your "first medical" of most of its fears; and you have obtained, by the way, a Rugger

"blue," of which you are, no doubt, a great deal more proud. And now that all this has been accomplished you turn to your former guide, and say to him, "Whither away?" And like Gilbert's poor wit, I feel inclined to retort very truthfully that I do indeed wither away. Behold, I have vanished. The mountain range is before you. Choose your summit.

. . . . . .

As if to point a moral, I have been here interrupted by a pitiful voice over the telephone. Indeed for a week past, I have been its victim at varying intervals. For Mrs. Cholmondeley, let us call her, cannot make up her mind between the rival hygienic attractions of Cannes and Torquay. As a matter of fact Camberwell or Camden Town would be equally, probably more, effectual. Organically she is perfectly sound. For the rest she is merely over-fed and under-occupied. She has deleted very nearly every healthful activity from her list of physical employments. And now those of her will are to be similarly abandoned; delegated to paid assistants like myself.

Cannes or Torquay? Well, I have refused the responsibility of deciding. In league with her long-suffering family physician, I am endeavour-

ing to force her faculties to make this little effort by themselves. For I doubt if the sorrowful gates of illness behold anything more entirely pitiable than the spectacle of a will on crutches.

Well then, having, as you see, completely foisted the ultimate issue upon your own shoulders, it seems to me that there are three main standpoints from which you must regard our profession before finally deciding to embark upon it. To take the least important of these first, you must bear in mind, I think, that while you should undoubtedly be able to pay your way, and to make an honest living, yet the financial rewards that medicine has to offer are scarcely worth considering. Given an equal amount of capital, both in brain-power and pounds sterling, your hours of work, your expenditure of energy, your capacity for diagnosis and research, your readiness at the reading of human nature, would bring you a far greater return of this world's goods in almost any other occupation that you care to name—incomparably so in commerce. At the same time I don't think that this point of view will detain you very long; because, however little fathers may really know of their own sons (and the sum of parental ignorance under this

heading must be something rather stupendous), I am quite sure that the financial laurel, *per se*, has no overwhelming attraction for you.

Having deigned then to consider the problem from this lowest and most sordid standpoint, you should shift your ground, I think, and reflect upon it from the midmost of my three Pisgahs, the scientific one. If I haven't led you to this first, it is because you have probably scrambled up it already, and paid no attention at all to the one that I have just recommended to you. And in a sense your instinct will perhaps have taken you by a straighter route to the heart of this matter than that which your more prudent parent has indicated. Because ultimately it is from this point that you will have to make your final decision. You must ask yourself, with all the earnestness of a novice at his altar-vigil, "Am I prepared to *know?*"

For the long day of the charlatan and the quack is drawing at last to its close, and their sun is even now setting in a blaze of patent-medicine advertisements. Modern Europe has almost ceased to be possible for the would-be Paracelsus; even America will not contain him, I think, for very much longer. And through a dissolving mist of white spats and atrocious Latin the eyes of

humanity are turning slowly, but very surely, towards the man who *knows*. Are you prepared to become such a man ?

I fancy that I can see your forehead wrinkling a little here ; so let me explain myself in a parable. There is an old story, familiar in the hospitals, of a bygone practitioner whose simple habit it was to tie a piece of string about the waist of his patient. He would then ask the sufferer to locate the pain. If this were above the string he administered an emetic, if below a purgative ; while if the pain and the string coincided, the unhappy victim would receive both. Now it is melancholy to reflect that this gentleman has never been without disciples. And yet how difficult at times may it become to avoid such a fate. Are you prepared to avoid it ?

Let me put the question in yet another shape. Some day a patient will come to you—you may be quite certain that he will—at the end of a long round or an exhausting afternoon at hospital ; will complain to you of his lamentable depression of spirits, his entire loss of appetite, his slight but continual headache ; and will show you, in confirmation of these symptoms, nothing graver, let us say, than a dull eye and a yellowish tongue.

You will be tired; you will see at a glance that his subjective troubles are altogether disproportionate to the objective gravity of his complaint, and perhaps justifiably you will send him away happy, or at any rate contented, in the belief that he is a bit "liverish." But are you going to allow "liverish" to satisfy yourself? "Of course not," you reply; and yet, believe me, my son, it will be a very real temptation. Why bother, at a long day's end, to worry your tired faculties into presenting to your mind as exact a mental picture of the man's actual condition as they can draw? Nevertheless, unless you do this, you will be treating him with less respect than your old bicycle in the coach-house; as though, if it should creak or wheeze or begin to run less smoothly, you would merely tell yourself that it was "wheelish," and drop oil at random into its most convenient aperture. Do you begin to see what I am driving at?

And then you will probably turn upon me and say, "But to cultivate this habit of forming proper mental pictures, I shall have to be at least a chemist, a physicist, a pathologist, a bacteriologist, to say nothing of a philosopher; and how can a single human being, however industrious, contain as many persons as these?" And of course

he cannot. Upon no more than one branch of the tree of Healing will it be given to you to climb out a little farther than your fellows; but, at any rate, you can keep your eye upon the others. It is in this way alone that you can become a scientific physician in the best and broadest sense. And you can take my word for it that it will never be worth your while to become any other sort of a sawbones—an exacting prospect? I agree with you. And many an hour will come to you with the easy question, "Why lavish all this time and trouble in gathering up some very trifling grain of extra knowledge—knowledge that, in all probability, will never become of the least importance in your hands?"

And then, perhaps, a moment will flash into your life when this very grain shall shape a million destinies. Are you prepared to live for that moment?

I am almost tempted to finish my letter at this question mark; and the more so because the great public, or such of it as has been led away by a certain school of literary sentimentalists, has plastered my final mound of observation—shall we call it the human one?—with such a viscid layer of adulation that it has become a little hard for a self-respecting physician to take his stand

there even for two and a half moments. Has ever, I wonder, a doctor figured in fiction or drama who, being neither a clown nor a fool, was not described as noble? Have we not tracked him on his rounds through unconscionable horrors, and wept big tears at his preposterous death-bed? No wonder such a fellow finds it hard to get his bills paid. To offer him mere money would seem little less than sacrilege.

And yet, I think, you will agree with me that here is an aspect of medicine worth consideration. To the seeing eye and the tender hand there is no easier door into the warm heart of humanity. There is no other profession that will lead you quite so close to reality. And by this I don't mean realism in the modern sense, wherein, as it seems to me, the altogether ugly looms so disproportionately large. For after thirty years of tolerably wide opportunity I have still failed to find the altogether ugly. And though of course you will meet ugliness in plenty—a cancer that will find you shocked and, alas, largely impotent—yet, if you look long enough, and carefully enough, how often will you discover it to be but the shadow of some clearly shining spiritual beauty. No, you need not fear, I think, to tread behind the veil.

And now let me round off my epistle with a brief reminiscence. In my early twenties, just after I had qualified, I travelled down to a small fishing-village in Cornwall to act there as locum tenens for a practitioner who had finally broken down in health. The practice, mostly among a poor population, was a scattered one, and I was kept fairly busy ; so busy, in fact, that beyond a hazy impression of buffeting across estuaries in big-bottomed ferryboats, and driving, upon a wild night or two, along as rough a coast-line as one could desire to see, I remember very little of that month's experiences.

One remains with me. And you must imagine a rather tumble-down, twopenny-halfpenny cottage, half-way down a cobbled street, with its front door opening directly into a tiny living-room. A youthful-looking Hippocrates is backing out of it rather more awkwardly than usual. And in front of him, still holding one of his hands, is a willowy, comely Cornish lass, mother of three, with the most disturbingly moist-looking eyes. In the background there would be, I think, a very old and rugged woman, crooning over her youngest grandchild, just recovered, happily, and rather miraculously, from a very tough attack of pneumonia. The young man had been telling

them, this simple family, that he was going away now, back to London and the big hospital. And hence—dare I write it?—hence these tears.

"Ah, doctor," says the lassie, "'tis wisht you've made us. An' whatever'll us do now if the little uns take bad?"

"Oh, rot," says the blushing physician, jolted for the moment out of a rather elaborate bedside manner—"nonsense, I mean. You'll get along all right. There's another man coming. And I didn't do anything, you know, really."

"Didn't do nothen'? D'you hear that, mother?" And the old woman looks up, with her wrinkled cheeks and cavernous, sea-blue eyes. "D'you think us don't know very well as you've saved the poor lamb's life?"

And so, as Pepys would say, into the wet, bright street, and up the hill to the surgery. She was under a misapprehension, of course. Presently, if you take up medicine, you will learn that a doctor's part in the treatment of pneumonia consists chiefly of a masterly inactivity. But a boy of twenty-four can't hear words like that spoken to him, and remain quite the same person; even if next week he is busy bashing hats in at a Hospital Cup-tie. By the way, I got mine rather

badly damaged last Wednesday when Guy's won the cup again. And, I think, now you have read this letter, that I can almost hear you murmuring, "No wonder."

Your affect. father,

P. H.

III

To Miss Josephine Summers, The Cottage, Potham, Beds.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
March 14, 1910.

MY DEAR AUNT JOSEPHINE,

I am very glad to learn that your health on the whole has not been much worse since your visit to us last month. And I have no doubt that this last week's sunshine will have already improved it. Claire is now quite fit again after a mild attack of mumps, and goes back to Eastbourne in two days' time.

With regard to your rheumatism, there are, as you say, several kinds of this complaint, or at any rate a good many affections that go popularly under the same name. And I think that it is quite likely that the wearing of a ring upon your third finger might very probably benefit your own particular variety, though I am much more doubtful about its efficacy in the case of your coachman's wife. Yes, there are two l's in bacilli, as you point out, but I'm afraid that the article

you read in the paper is quite correct in stating that our insides contain a very large number of these active little animals. Nor is the female sex exempt, I'm sorry to say. But it is an idea that one soon gets used to, and I doubt if the measures that you suggest will make a very great difference either to their health or your own. But there was once a wise old doctor who used to say that between milk and good sound blood there was no difference but the colour. Personally I prefer it sweet. But the sour kind is no doubt better than none at all.

With best love from Esther and the girls,

Your affect. nephew,

PETER HARDING.

IV

To Colonel R. F. Morris, C.B., 7th Division, Meerut, India.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
March 15, 1910.

MY DEAR RUPERT,

It gave me real joy to see your handwriting again this morning on the breakfast-table. Only last week I had been thinking that one of your rare letters was about due. So you have just had the time of your life, have you, during your last shoot in Kashmir, and find Meerut, as a result, pretty deadly—and oh to be in England now that April's nearly there? A pestilent thing, isn't it, this divine discontent? Only last week I had a letter from old Bob Lynn. You remember Bob. You were his fag, I think, for half a term. London, London, London—that was the burden of his desire; and he with a trout stream, by turns cavernous and romantic and sheerly lyrical, splashing his very doorstep!

And now here are you, too, sighing for Pall Mall and the Park, whereas I, who have them

both, would hold six months at Meerut as a cheap price indeed for those seven weeks of Kashmir forests. Is it racial, or universal, or merely temperamental, I wonder, this passionate yearning to be elsewhere—some uncrushable remnant of Romance? I give it up. I am sure that it is a nuisance; and equally certain that it is in reality the very salt of life.

Coming home sometimes in a tube railway-carriage—the latest invention of the modern impersonal Devil—I glance down the long line of returning City faces. There they are, sleek, absorbed, consciously prosperous. And I wonder if they are to be read as indications of an absolute content; or do they conceal, by some stern effort of will, a restless desire for snow mountains, forests, moors, streams, sunshine, anything in fact that is the antithesis of Oxford Circus? It is hard to believe it; and yet I am not so sure that it is even unlikely. For as Matthews, the alienist, said to me the other day, the only *really* contented people are usually to be found in lunatic asylums. So we must give them the benefit of the doubt. But it's news that you want and not surmise.

And first of all let me reassure you, and with no shadow of professional reserve, about your

aunt—I was almost going to write your mother—Lady Wroxton. For a month or two, it is true, I was really in anxiety about her. Sir Hugh's death was a literal dividing in twain of every interest of her life, and the very breadth and diversity of these was the consequent measure of her suffering. But, as you know, that fine, deep-founded will of hers could never really fail her. And even in the darkest days of her first grief and almost complete insomnia it was there for us inadequate physicians to work upon—our stay and hers. Since then she has been resting down at Stoke, and has been progressing slowly but steadily. I saw her last month for half an hour, and Rochester, one of the best of G.P.'s, has written to me with increasing confidence in each letter; so that I hope, when you return in the autumn, you will find her again the strong, serene woman whom we both love so well.

As regards ourselves—well, if the ratio between happiness and history that is supposed to hold good for nations is equally true of families, ours must be singularly blessed. For, upon my soul, I find it very hard to think of any at all. We are all a little older, of course, and both Esther and I have made modest additions to our equipment of grey hairs. For me there is, at any rate, in

this the compensation of that increasing maturity of appearance which lends weight to my opinions in the eyes of a good many of my patients. For Esther, I suppose, there is none. But (I speak of course as a husband. And who should know better?) they are not altogether unbecoming.

And it is chiefly in the children that the march of time is being most visibly displayed for us. Every month, or so it seems to us, they are altering before our eyes. And the adventures, as a consequence, have been chiefly theirs. Horace, for example, has filled out and solidified to an alarming extent during the last year or so, tips the scale at thirteen stone, ventures an occasional opinion on wine and the other members of its trinity, and has succeeded in attaining his Rugger "blue." It is his last year at Cambridge though and I'm afraid that the memory of his one and only Varsity match at Queen's is likely to be a little chequered. For, as you probably know, it was a record defeat; and though both teams were fairly matched as regarded the forwards, Oxford was vastly superior in all other departments of the game, as the sporting papers say. But it was a great spectacle for the onlookers. The Oxford threes, magnificently set in motion by their stand-

off half, were quite an ideal picture of clever and unselfish attack. Time and again they swept down the field, alert, speedy, and opportunist, in the cleanest sense of the word. The weakness of the opposition flattered them, no doubt. But it was a splendid and invigorating exhibition for all that, and one that must have sent the blood tingling enviously down a good many middle-aged arteries. For there's always something superbly tonic about this particular match, emanating even more from the surrounding crowd than from the actual struggle of healthy young athletes that it has come to witness. There is no other large crowd quite like it, so unanimously well-coloured, clean, and cheerful, so lusty of shoulder and clear of eye. The winter air has set a colour in the girls' cheeks, to be heightened presently by the instructed ardour with which they follow the doings of their cousins and brothers, or cousins' and brothers' friends. And even the old duffers among us seem to don an infectious vitality as we greet our grey-haired friends by rope and doorway. The strained eyes and late-night cheeks that are not uncommon at such comparable gatherings as those at Lord's and Henley are to be sought in vain at this mid-winter festival. And I can think of no sounder answer to the

modern cries of race-degeneracy than a stroll round Queen's at half-time. "Ah, but that shows you merely the cream," you may tell me. But then races, like milks, must be judged, I think, by the cream that they produce. And this particular spectacle at Queen's is sufficiently reassuring both as to quality and amount.

Well, it was a great game, and I wish you could have been there to see it. Molly, with the halo of Newnham still upon her, was as enthusiastic as her tradition will allow, while Claire, on a special holiday from her school at Eastbourne, was quite openly broken-hearted for poor Horace's sake. However, he got enough hero-worshipping next day to soothe the most wounded of defeated warriors. The more prosaic problem of how to tackle his future is troubling him now; and I more than half suspect him of designs on Medicine.

Molly, on the other hand, is disturbed by no such uncertainty. She is already on the committee of the W.S.P.U., which being interpreted means the Women's Social and Political Union; and concerns herself vigorously with the vexed questions of adult suffrage and the feminine vote. Besides this she is assistant manager of a girls' club in Hoxton, and combines an intense faith in

the political future of her sex with an ardent admiration for Mr. Wells and Mr. Shaw. Religiously, she is, for the moment (to the acute distress of some of our nearer relatives), inclining to an up-to-date form of polytheism; but hedges with an occasional (rather unobtrusive) attendance at a more orthodox early service. Fortunately she is inveterately addicted to the coldest of cold baths, the roughest of towels, and a plentiful breakfast. Moreover another phase of experience is presenting itself modestly, but with a quite unmistakable sturdiness, to her consideration. He is a nice, open-air sort of boy (*entre nous*, Bob Lynn junior. What fogies we are getting, to be sure), untroubled about the constitution of his *ego*, and frankly bored by politics, but with a passion for his microscope that must be running, I think, a very neck-and-neck sort of race with his admiration for Miss Molly.

Tom, as you know, is still at Rugby; and about him we are all, that is Esther and I and Jakes, his house-master, a little anxious. For it seems that during the latter part of his Christmas holidays, which he spent with a friend at Scarborough, he fell very deeply under the influence of one of those ardent, but dangerous, people possessed of what they describe as a passion for souls. This

particular one, a sort of nondescript with private means, was what he called, and what he has tried to make Tom and his friend, an "out and outer."

Obviously shyly, Tom sent us a programme of this man's meetings—he was holding a mission to schoolboys—from which we gathered that his particular spiritual preserves are confined to our larger public schools. He was a little careful to emphasise this. Boys from elsewhere were only permitted to hear him by special introduction. He has not apparently been to a public school himself; but owns, or was once owned by, one of the more recent colleges at Cambridge. I hope that I am not writing this too bitterly, for I am trying to be kind to his motives. But the results of his efforts upon Tom have been, up to the present, rather devastating. The boy is quite clearly in earnest, has been indeed very profoundly stirred. With one or two others he has started a meeting for prayer in his house, has given up singing his comic songs, and has been systematically tackling his fellows about their souls' health.

Knowing a little bit about the boy, I should scarcely have been able to believe all this, if Jakes hadn't written to me so very fully about

the matter. He is acting quite wisely, I think—has given full permission and facilities for their little meetings, with a gentle word or two about the inadvisability of too much publicity. Nevertheless a certain amount of natural, and, as I can't help feeling, healthy hostility has sprung up against the movement—a hostility that we both fear is being interpreted by the boys, and their spiritual adviser, as persecution for their Lord's sake.

I doubt if you'll understand much of this. Your temperament has always been too downright, too untroubled with spiritual questionings, too simply aware of the "things we don't talk about." "Isn't this all rather like cant?" I can imagine you wondering. But it isn't by any means all cant. And that is what makes the whole question so difficult to deal with. For into the warm nest of the boy's soul this holy blunderer has thrust his easy, ignorant fingers, pulling out, as it were, the fledgling spiritual secrets. They were not ready for the air and the light and the winds. They were tucked away, as a wise Nature meant them to be, under the protecting feathers of the natural boy's carelessness. And now, since they have been plucked out into the open for all the world to see, they

must needs flap their premature wings in a sort of pitiful, earnest foolishness. While we, who know so well what has really happened, can only stand by, at whatever cost, to see that the half-sprouted pinions may not beat themselves into some permanent distortion or futility—may become, after all, those strong, supporting structures that they were designed for at their birth.

And all the while there will be the ever-present danger of the natural boy himself discovering suddenly, in a dumb sort of way, that his fledgling has been making (as he will most certainly put it) a little fool of itself. And then how desperately likely will he be to disown it altogether, to his lifelong incompleteness. Self-constituted missioners to schoolboys should be required to possess a licence. And it should be pretty difficult to obtain.

Claire you will still find, I think, when you come home next autumn, very much of the pure child, for all her fifteen and a half years. Hockey and Henty bound her physical and mental horizons, and she writes periodical letters to Tom urging the army as the only possible profession for him. And now I must put a stop to what will seem in your bachelor eyes the prosy outpourings of the typical family man. But then

your Kashmir precipices are not for all of us, you know; and I have only just been giving you what you asked for.

Yours as ever,

PETER HARDING.

P.S.—There will of course be a spare bedroom and a well-stoked fire here against your return next October.

V

To Hugh Pontrex, Villa Rosa, Mentone.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
March 23, 1910.

MY DEAR HUGH,

Our exchange of letters, since you finally left our fickle climate, has become so regular that I would apologise for not having written to you since the New Year, were it not that by so doing I should be distilling the poison of formality into the pot-luck of our correspondence. So I won't.

I am sorry to hear that the bronchitis has been bothering you again, joining hands with *anno Domini* to remind you of our human frailty. But your fingers, I see, have lost none of their cunning, and I immensely enjoyed your little exhibition of etchings at Obach's. Two of them I have acquired, I am glad to say, and they are looking at me as I write. And now I almost think that I shall have to take a third. It has drifted into Obach's window, and for several days past its fascination has been growing upon me. Three or four times in passing I have paused

to consider it; and on each occasion it has brightened far more than Bond Street for me.

It is the drawing of the little flower-girl who has forgotten her wares to feast her eyes upon the silk gown in the shop-window. And there was a time, I think, when an older, or younger, Pontrex would rather have scorned to descend upon so well-worn a theme—it would have seemed a descent in those days. And at first I thought that even now you had thrown it in among the others as a kind of sop to the easy sentiments of the majority. But I have learned better, I think, and discovered that you have treated what is, after all, the perennially beautiful with all your own scrupulous severity.

I met such a little girl only to-day in Aldgate. She was not selling flowers, and was singularly northern in type—coming home, I should guess, from afternoon school. Moving mechanically through the maze of hurrying passengers, she was obviously as deaf to the street-side costers as to the more thunderous traffic of the dock-yard waggons. At the corner of Houndsditch we almost collided, and she looked up for a moment from her book. It was a healthy and piquant little face, if typically town-bred, that she turned towards mine. But the look, if I could have cap-

tured it on canvas, would have done more than immortalise us both. For there was reflected in it—just for a moment—the very dazzle itself of that authentic Wonder which some of us call Mysticism, and some Romance; but which is only half named by them both. And I should greatly have liked to ask her what book had wrought the miracle. But the currents of crossing pedestrians separated us almost instantly, though not so quickly as the look itself had bolted back into hiding, leaving in its stead a very ordinary little schoolgirl extending the tip of a small pink tongue.

"'Ullo, fice," she said.

So I blessed her, and went on my way rejoicing; and was quite ignorant, for at least a quarter of an hour, of the very gorgeous pageant of smoke and sunset that faced me towards Cheapside. For, like yourself, it is always the humanity that these things frame that captures me first and holds me longest. And I believe I would exchange any merely physical panorama in the world for a new vista of the human soul. So greatly indeed is this preference growing in me that, keenly as I love it, I find my English landscape already rearranging itself in my memory. Where it was once punctuated by trees or monuments or natural wonders, it is now becoming

mapped out for me by such trivial affairs as some passing word of greeting or chance exchange of easy gossip. At this bend of the road I met the decidedly tipsy old rascal who assured me that he had made his début with Henry Irving. By that hedge two little girls gave me a spontaneous, and consequently very sweet, small handful of half-ripe blackberries.

So your little flower-seller has gone to my heart; and if Esther will let me—and I think that she will—I shall take her into my house as well. Can I tell you more than this? My opinion on your technique is not worth having, as you know very well. I only know that I am less conscious of it in these latest etchings of yours than in any of the others; and that too ought to count for praise, I think. And in any case I mean it as such. For indeed it is rather refreshing just now to be able, for once in a way, to ignore technique, or at any rate so unconsciously to take it for granted that the message conveyed by it at once, and alone, fills the mind. Because, *entre nous*, I seem lately to have diagnosed in most of our galleries a small epidemic of—shall we say?—hypertechnique. The origin of the malady cannot, I think, be very deep-seated. But its outward and visible signs are

rather striking eruptions of a polymorphic type, for the most part somewhat grotesque, and not infrequently even a little nauseous. And they are very modern. Nothing quite like them has ever been seen before; unless—can it be possible?—every age has known them, but time, in his mercy, has hidden them in due season—a reflection that is not without a certain comfort, since its corollary suggests the same process as being at work to-day—unobtrusively, no doubt, but with equal certainty. As Wensley said to me last week, if the authorities could only be induced to put up, for example, Velasquez' Philip IV, or The Laughing Cavalier among the annual exhibits of the New English Art Club, even the most completely self-satisfied of Mr. John's young ladies would call out for a catalogue to cover her nakedness. But, alas, Philip IV remains where he is, and the neo-intellectuals of the art-world still perspire admiration round their master's most recent visions, to drift hence, in due season, that they may do homage to those "obscenities in lavender" on the one hand, and the Bedlamite echoes of Van Gogh on the other, that emerge annually from Paris to soil our walls in the name of progress.

Poor Wensley, he is still chipping away at his

unprofitable marble, spending two years over a group that his conscience forbids him to finish in as many months. Every year there are rumours that the Chantrey trustees are to buy something from his studio. And every year they just fail to do so for varying reasons. Poor Wensley, if ever a genius cut life out of marble (and will never, I'm afraid, cut marble out of life) it is he, hammering his years away in the purlieus of Chelsea. I have seen a good deal of him lately, and once I am fairly inside his studio find it very hard to escape those siren hands of his white-limbed men and maidens under a good two hours. His group for this year's Academy, if he has been able to finish it, will be as good as, if not better than, anything that he has yet done, I think. May the gods be kind to him, for he needs their pity in more ways than one. He is too good to be allowed to fritter his life away in illustrating nursery books and repairing mediocre saints; and there are times when one cannot help feeling that his long knocking at the gates of official appreciation is making him just a little bitter—brief times, for the next moment his eye will be bright again and his smile so boyish as to make his fifty years of struggle seem almost mythical.

Leaving him there, with his beautiful, un-

wanted works about him, I always encounter a certain wave of spiritual depression. For, look where one will, one's eyes would seem to be confronted only with the grotesque, the degenerate, the pernicious; so much so that it becomes hard to realise them merely as the little unworthy successes of a very passing hour. Our newest music would appear fain to wed itself to the obscene imaginings of a decadent poesy, to find its loftiest inspiration in pathological versions of Elektra and Salome. Our latest dances seek to lift into the very publicity that he lives for the erotic beastliness of some such vicious weakling as a Parisian apache. Our most up-to-date novels probe the labyrinths of sexual perversity at a shilling a time under the banner of an emancipated virility, and our Sunday newspapers reap the dung-hills for their headlines.

By this time, if it is on foot, my middle-Victorianism will nearly have reached South Kensington Station, or, if it has been driving, Carter's rosy-gilled countenance will be at the carriage-door wondering why it doesn't get out. And so the wave will pass over me, and I shall be rocking once again upon a more equable ocean. I shall behold your little flower-girl hungering for her beautiful gown, and beside

her nine-tenths at least of her brothers and sisters, hands out for the real beauty, and entirely impervious to the Wildes and the Strausses, the Beardsleys, Johns, and Polaires. After all—let us remember it humbly with thanksgiving—these people do not penetrate our homes. They are doled out to us in public. We scan them in galleries. They are momentary sensations in the circulating libraries. But we don't live with them. At least I don't think we do, and in one way and another I have seen the insides of a good many different homes. For a man may perhaps temporarily subordinate his sense of decency to a well-meaning desire for artistic fairness. He may accord a judicial word of praise to some particularly masterly portrayal of a libertine's blotches or the pimples of a fading courtesan. But he will seldom bear them home in his bosom to set up among his *lares* and *penates*. And since it is by these that we must judge (for they are the heart-judgment of the race), my billow of pessimism drops behind me and expends itself in foam upon the rocks.

No, it is our Thackerays and Fieldings, our Dickenses and Shakespeares, that we still escort, hats off, to the true and formative intimacy of our firesides. Our Blyths and Waleses and

Victoria Crosses—my classification is mainly themic—are for furtive journeys on the underground, and a hasty burying in obscure corners; where a sanitary Providence no doubt arranges for them some useful and inconspicuous destiny.

Well, the hour is late, and I must stop. I can hear footsteps in the hall, and in comes Molly, looking very gay, if a little sleepy, in her newest evening frock. She has just been with some rather dull girls (Ah, Molly, Molly, they are non-Shavians, I admit, but just talk to them about horses!) to see a play. "The—*what* was the name, my dear?"

"'The Scarlet Pimpernel,'" confesses Molly.

I look surprised—even incredulous—remembering certain sweeping damnations of a month or two ago. "But surely," I venture timidly, "isn't that the very—er—acme of provincial melodrama?"

The words have a strangely familiar sound, and Molly appears to recognise them.

"Of course it is," she says. "I was *taken* there."

The expression suggests ropes and cart-tails, and I commiserate with her appropriately.

"Poor Molly, and of course you—you——"

But my courage fails me, and I dare not

finish the question. She tosses her dark head a little.

"W-well," she stammers, and then, being very honest with herself, stops short, and begins to grow a little pink. I gasp, half rising from my chair.

"Surely," I exclaim, "you—you don't mean to say you actually *enjoyed* it?"

There is a moment's appalled stillness; and then, very rosy, she stoops suddenly to kiss my forehead.

"Daddy," she says, "you're an old *beast*."

Ever yrs.,

PETER HARDING.

VI

To Miss Sarah Harding, The Orphanage, Little Blessington, Dorset.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
March 31, 1910.

MY DEAR SALLY,

If the proprietors of a very excellent emulsion of cod liver oil did not send me (as they do) a little memorandum book at the beginning of each year, I should find letter-writing to my sister considerably more difficult. The book is not spacious enough to be called a diary, and the lines allotted to each day are merely sufficient to contain the baldest records of two or three dry facts. But while it is less than a diary, for the keeping of which, if it weren't for you, I'm afraid that I should never have had even the desire, it is entirely valuable as a means to an end. And may the aforesaid proprietors wax therefore as fat and well-liking as their advertised babies. For although you may never have thought of it, oh sister mine, it was by no means an easy condition that you imposed upon me in exchange for your consent to my wedding.

"One letter a month, Peter," I can see your stern uplifted finger even now, "one letter a month you must faithfully promise me, or Esther shall only capture you over my dead body."

And although in those glorious days it seemed but a little bargain to set one's hand to, yet I may now reveal to your horrified gaze—as regards the pre-emulsion period at any rate—visions of a haggard physician battering his cranium in a desperate effort to jog his memory for news. A little reflection will secure you from considering this to be an affront. For the very existence of such visions is the most eloquent testimony to the state of his brotherly affections; and to prevent your instantly taking the next train to town, I can assure you positively that the wing of a merciful providence (the liver wing) took him under its protection at the psychological moment. Thanks to the cod, its oil, and the emulsion thereof, his memory has been propped up just when he began to need it most. And this is why I can assure you most positively that, although ourselves and our daffodils are shrivelling to-day in the bitterest of easterly winds, but three short weeks ago we were picking primroses in the woods of Upper Basildon.

We were staying of course with Uncle Jacob, who was celebrating his seventy-sixth birthday and the fourth anniversary of his retirement from the judicial bench in contravening all the known rules of health—or, at any rate, the modern conception of them. Esther and Molly went down on the Friday night, and I joined them on Saturday, his birthday.

It was a lovely warm morning, with just enough briskness in the air to remind one that winter was still fighting a rearguard action, and just enough warmth in the sun to make one quite certain that it would end in a general defeat. Slipping into Portland Road Station in golfing kit, I caught an early train at Paddington, and was down at Goring soon after ten, where Esther and Molly met me in the pony-trap. We were to spend the day upon some private links upon the downs above Streatley, a beautiful, invigorating piece of country, and an offshoot, I think, of the Berkshire Ridgeway. From a strictly golfing point of view the course is, I suppose, an easy one. To players like myself, of the occasional order, too delighted at achieving anything that may decently be called a stroke to mind very much about a little pulling or slicing, the penalties, no doubt, are scarcely severe enough. But there are

possibilities, at any rate, of some grand, exhilarating drives; the greens are capital; and there is seldom the nerve-racking ordeal of playing off before a multitude of cynical observers.

Instead, this particular course is filled for me with memories of elemental foursomes, innocent of caddies, unwitnessed by any living creature other than some simple sheep or an occasional pony, but filled to the brim with such dramatic fluctuations of chance and skill as are unknown to (or at any rate unremembered by) your poor plus 1 players at Richmond or St. Andrews. For golf, like her fairer sister cricket, reveals her wild and fickle heart in a truer lovableness at such places as this. Kneeling on immaculate turf, you may salute her queenly finger-tips at Hoylake or Sandwich or Rye—as her sister's at Lord's. But to know her as she is—to know them both as they really are—to snatch kisses from their sweet and rosy lips, to look deep into their honest, if baffling eyes, you must woo them, afar from fashion, by brae-side and village green.

And yet—and yet—well, perhaps that's just how we duffers always did talk. Like amateur mountaineers, we are fain to conceal our lack of craft in an admiration of extraneous circumstances—such as the view, for instance. And

indeed the view from almost any of these particular eighteen holes is of the most comforting type that I know—a wide, pastoral expanse, silvered here and there with water, and apparently melting upon its horizons into a veiled and delicate endlessness. Upon such a view I would quite willingly close my eyes for the last time. And when the day comes for me to retire it will be to the arm of some such westward hill as this that I shall trust my agéd pilgrimage.

Grindelwald, Como, Cap Martin—they are good enough company for a mile or two of the road. To have known them has been a real privilege, and to meet them again would be an equal joy. But for the long, all-weathers' tramp, for the comfortable silences of true comradeship, and above all for those last hobbling footsteps of the journey, give me some little hill like this above English cornlands.

And, taking everything into consideration, I can really find very little in the way of an emotional demand that the view, for example, from the fourth hole of this particular course doesn't amply satisfy. For eyes necessarily accustomed to close studies and narrower outlooks there is space enough and to spare, and grandeur too, if they are content to accept it from above rather

than below, and to feast upon those heavenly Himalayas and ethereal Pacifics that Nature and a south-west wind will always provide for the untravelled. As an echo, or perhaps fountain, of which sentiments let me extract for you three verses from a weekly paper upon my table. They are entitled—it is the Prayer Book heading of the traveller's psalm—"Levavi oculos."

Mahomed, when the mountains stood
  Aloof from his so strong desire,
Mahomed, being great and good—
  And likewise free—concealed his ire.
And since their will might not be bent,
Mahomed to the mountains went.

I too, a clerk in Bedford Row,
  Long years the mountains yearned to see,
And since to them I could not go,
  Besought that they might come to me.
"If Faith," I said, "can mountains move,
How surely should they come for Love."

And lo, to-day I watch them crowd,
  Range upon range, above my head,
Cordilleras of golden cloud,
  And snow-white Andes, captive-led,
Yea, Himalayas, crowned with snow,
Above my head in Bedford Row.

Wiser than Mahomed, like this little clerk, I begin to think that I can see myself enthroned,

in my retirement, and letting my mountains be brought to my door. Moreover to old age, a little timid of loneliness, such a view as this would be completely reassuring. Cottages, manor-houses, Oxford with her dreaming spires, they are all contained within its broad and kindly grasp. Life, human life, trivial, cheery, part and parcel of the ages, has not here been sacrificed to any merely scenic splendour; while beneath it, if still flowing through it, lies the fierce and jovial memory of Briton and Saxon and Dane, their frames long since a part of this quiet crucible, and all but the heroic of their memories—a peaceable reflection—distilled into oblivion.

Yes, one might do a great deal worse, I think, than retire to Streatley. At any rate that is Uncle Jacob's opinion, and he has been there a year.

"View?" he remarked, when I pointed it out to him, "God bless my soul, it's the finest view in England. Let me see, where are they? Aha, just there. No, that's not them. *There* they are—the Wittenham Clumps. My honour, I think. Fore!"

When you have stayed here so long as an afternoon and evening, you will perceive that as St. Paul's to Ludgate Hill or the cross to Banbury,

so are the Wittenham Clumps to Streatley. They are, at any rate, its soundest conversational investment.

We celebrated the evening with a feast to which Uncle Jacob had bidden several of his fellow-bachelors—Esther and Molly being the only ladies honoured with an invitation. Uncle Jacob, who has never, I should think, for the last thirty years consumed less than five glasses of port a night, accompanied, upon normal occasions, by two cigars, and followed, a little later, by a couple of large whiskies-and-sodas, was in great form, and very anecdotal. He did full justice to an excellent repast, and was knocking at our bedroom door at seven the next morning to summon us for early service.

"After that, sir, you may loaf, lounge, practise approach shots in the garden, play billiards, or pick primroses. But every able-bodied person must attend divine service at least once on Sundays while he is a guest under my roof." And so there he was, pink from his morning tub, and with an autocratic twinkle in an eye as clear as yours. I have often, I'm afraid, in a horrid, professional sort of way, contemplated Uncle Jacob, who is typical of a distinct class of prosperous old gentlemen, albeit not a large one.

All my training and instincts tell me that he eats too much, and drinks too much. And I know that, until his retirement, his life, as a county-court judge, was almost wholly sedentary. And yet here he is at seventy-six, cheerful, vigorous, and very pleasantly self-satisfied—so apparently sound himself, in fact, as to be perhaps just a little bit intolerant of the frailties of others. Personally I am always tempted—a little unfairly, since he is really a trifle exceptional—to wield him as a bludgeon over the misguided pates of fanatical vegetarians. But, on the other hand, how just as reasonably might not some headstrong *bon viveur* wield him over mine, who am of course a preacher of the simple life. No, I think that Uncle Jacob has three things to thank for the blithe appearance that he cuts before the world: his forefathers' healthy and athletic simplicity; the fact that both by temperament and profession he has lived an objective, rather than a subjective, life; and finally the truth—Medicine's most comfortable axiom—that Nature, given half a chance, will always come up smiling. He is lusty *malgré lui*.

Apart from this little visit in the country I have been very busy; and some difficult and rather critical cases have tied me to town ever

since. Horace, after some hesitation, has decided to take up medicine, and is working already for his first and second examinations at Cambridge, where he will now, I think, stay an extra year. Next month Esther and I are snatching a week with old Bob Lynn at Applebrook, when young Calverley will look after my patients, and I shall, I hope, land trout for a little while instead of fees. Molly is well and very stately, biding her time, politically speaking, with a stern eye on Mr. Asquith and a doubtful one on Mr. Balfour. Claire decided after all that she would like to postpone her confirmation until next year. She came up for a week-end, at her mistress's wish, to consult about it.

"You see, Daddy," she told me thoughtfully, "I'm not *frightfully* keen on it"; and then after contemplating her toes for a moment, "It's not that I want to be wicked exactly, only I like feeling sort of comfy."

When Mummy came in we had a little talk about it, and it emerged, I think, that being "comfy" meant retaining certain rights as to dormitory feasts and midnight expeditions that were believed to be incompatible with the confirmed conscience. Next year it would be different. Well, I suppose next year it will; and

having preached her a little sermon, which she accepted very gracefully, we ended in a compromise. She was to be as good as she could, but need not take the irrevocable step till she felt quite ready for it—somewhere about next Easter.

Meanwhile she has discovered Mr. Stanley Weyman, and is doubtful if there is anything in all literature to compare with "Under the Red Robe," though one of the girls thinks "Count Hannibal" almost as good.

Tom's letters are terse, and, as I told you last month, we are still rather troubled about him.

My love to the orphans, with their proper little plaits and their shiny cheeks. And that they may continue to rejoice their matron's heart is the prayer of

Her affectionate brother

PETER.

VII

To Harry Carthew, Trenant Hotel, Leeds.

91B, HARLEY STREET, W.,
April 8, 1910.

MY DEAR CARTHEW,

I believe every word you tell me about yourself—that you are feeling, that is to say, pumped-out, uncertain, doubtful each morning if you can get through the day without breaking down, and as a result of it all, very wretched and depressed. At the same time I can only assure you, and I think you must accept my word as a trained man, that you are physically sound, and indeed at this very moment a "first-class life."

I know how difficult it is to believe all this when one is suffering as you are now. But believe me, it is the gospel truth, and one that you must reiterate daily, and if need be hourly, to yourself. Remember that all this is just a phase of experience. Twelve months from now you will be laughing at the memory of it. Twelve years hence it will have ceased even to be a memory. And if you could only observe your troubles from

without, as I do, you would see at once how very understandable they are.

For here are you, a busy enough barrister at all times, plunging headlong into the sea of electioneering, from which, after a very stormy month or two, you emerge to find heavy arrears of work awaiting you at chambers, to say nothing of two unexpectedly prolonged and arduous cases in the courts. In addition to these things you have been, as you tell me, caught up a little in the present whirlwind of rubber speculation, and have had rather disquieting reports of Eric's health in Switzerland.

Now I know you to be a healthy disbeliever in drugs, the possessor of a scepticism, in this respect, that I largely share. And I'm not going to wind up this letter with a prescription. But you tell me that your cases are now well in hand, and that you have four clear days before the Leeds Sessions begin; and therefore, if you will let me, I am going to assume the sceptre of the autocrat, and commandeer them for your good. First, then, select a bedroom with a south aspect, and have your bed pulled up beneath the window in such a manner that, being propped up with pillows, you can survey some little portion of the outside world. Having done this, prepare to

stop in it for thirty-six hours. The preparation will be simple. Procure a round table and a selection of suitable books. What these should be I daren't prescribe. Let me suggest widely that most of them should deal rather with abstracts than concretes, that some of them should therefore be books of poetry, but that a volume of Jacobs' stories should by all means be included. Select one newspaper only, and that of an unsensational character. Let me recommend, without prejudice to political convictions, the "Morning Post." As regards Eric, consign him mentally, as you have done actually, to the wisdom of his headmaster and the school doctor. And for the rest, commend your affairs to the discretion of your broker. Now as to diet—for twenty-four hours you must live on milk, and milk alone, no matter how hungry you may become. The hunger will by no means be hurtful, and you can console yourself by remembering that your bodily tissue-waste, while in bed, will be comparatively small. So much for the first day. For breakfast, upon the second, have a bowl of bread and milk. Lunch in bed on some sole or plaice, followed by a rice pudding and some stewed fruit. Rise at three, spend an hour in the garden if the day is warm enough, and have tea

at half-past four. Being in the provinces, this meal may be accompanied by two boiled eggs without creating undue attention. Have a warm bath, followed by a cold sponge-down, at seven o'clock, when you must retire to bed, supping on bread and milk at half-past eight, and taking thereafter some effective, but not too violent aperient, such as five grains of calomel, let us say, an hour later.

On the third day, having breakfasted in bed upon a cup of tea, two rounds of buttered toast and a boiled egg, you may rise at eleven, and take an hour's walk. For lunch you should have some boiled fish, potatoes, stewed fruit and custard. In the afternoon you should take another hour's walk, and have a cup of tea and some toast at half-past four. Dine in your room at half-past seven upon some clear soup, sole, a nicely grilled chop with some mashed potatoes, and any sort of sweet that you may fancy. Having dined, drink a cup of coffee, and smoke your first cigar among your fellow-men downstairs. Upon the fourth day, arise, and have a cold tub. Don some old and comfortable tweeds, eat the biggest breakfast of which you are capable, seize a stout stick, take an early train, and spend the day in the country, eating when and what you like, and

drinking, if you can get it, some good home-brewed ale. Go to bed early, and I will promise you that, upon the morning of the fifth, you will arrive in court at any rate relatively cheerful. A fortnight's holiday, when the sessions are over, will complete the good work.

Yrs. very sincerely,

PETER HARDING.

VIII

To John Summers, M.B., at Actonhurst, Granville Road, Bristol.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
April 12, 1910.

MY DEAR JACK,

I expect that, by this time, a good long night and twenty-four hours' reflection will have restored your equanimity. For I can't imagine that much more would be necessary, although I can sympathise, with a very sincere fellow-feeling. Bless you, my boy, it's happened to all of us—and goes on happening too, if that's any comfort to you.

Why even young Calverley, who was in here just now, and who looks, as you know, almost supernaturally solemn for his five-and-thirty years, was the victim of a similar experience only last week, under circumstances far less considerate than yours. For the old lady—the scene was somewhere near Cadogan Square, and it was his second visit—received him in person, sitting very bolt upright.

"You're very young," she told him. "I *don't* like you. And you don't understand my case."

So you see your experience has not been by any means unique; and I really don't think that you have any ethical ground for complaint. The lady considered you, quite erroneously of course, to be too inexperienced, and having told you so in a letter that is by no means ungraceful, has called in another practitioner. He may be, as you say, an ignorant old rotter. But that is irrelevant. And the fact that you are a locum tenens doesn't, I think, alter the situation.

After all, we are merely the servants of the public, in spite of our M.D.'s and our hospital appointments. And we must face the fact with as much philosophy as we can gather about us. If they don't want us, well, they won't have us, and there's the bitter end of it. Coming fresh from the hospital, where one has been, perhaps, a house-surgeon or house-physician, into the entirely different atmosphere of private practice, it is sometimes a bit hard to realise this, and the process is always a painful one. For between the house-surgeon, clad in white, backed up by the accumulated authority and tradition of his hospital, surrounded by satellite nurses, and perhaps (dare I breathe it?) a wee bit lordly, and

the very young man, in a new frock-coat, who will be ushered next week by a curious parlour-maid into a private drawing-room, there is all the difference in the world.

Moreover you seem to have got yourself into the sort of practice that for a young man is perhaps the most difficult to manage—a practice consisting almost entirely of prosperous and middle-class patients. I am not using the term middle-class—it is one that I particularly hate—in any derogatory sense, but *faute de mieux* as describing the very large stratum of society that pivots upon the shop-counter or the offices behind it. It is a stratum, as you will be sure to find out pretty soon, as kindly, honest, and really considerate as any other, and no less lacking in heroism and endurance. But it is one that has not yet fully acquired perhaps the habit of emotional suppression—the latest to be developed in social evolution—and is consequently a little addicted to superlatives, and still somewhat over-respectful, no doubt, to such mere externals as eloquence and millinery in other people. On the other hand it possesses an extremely accurate appreciation of the cash value of services rendered, and its consideration for a gentleman is by no means going to interfere with this when he

comes before them as a salesman of physic and incidentally of advice. Moreover—and it's no good being hypersensitive about it—we mustn't forget that we too, as a profession, have but lately differentiated ourselves from the ranks of retail commerce—so lately, in fact, that the barber tradition is far from being entirely defunct.

I can remember very well, for instance, in my first locum, a fortnight after I had qualified, standing behind the counter of a little surgery in Shadwell in response to a patient who had tapped upon it loudly with the edge of his shilling, and summoned me with a call of "Shop." Would I take out his tooth for sixpence? No, I wouldn't. A shilling was the recognised fee for this operation. Well, what about ninepence? No, not even for ninepence.

"Orl right, guv'nor, 'eave away then," and the shilling went into the till, while the tooth, neatly wrapped in paper, was borne homewards for domestic inspection. Nor are such incidents by any means uncommon even to-day, and they add excellent lessons to those of Winchester and New.

Then, too, you mustn't overlook the fact that mere youth itself is under a greater disadvantage in medicine than in almost any other profession.

The idea of a young advocate may fire the imagination. The idea of a young doctor only suggests distrust. A young lawyer, having the keener wit of youth, may be a safe adviser in our legal dilemmas. The young officer is the marrow of our army and navy. We may even venture to entrust our souls for spiritual guidance to some earnest young priest. But when it comes to our bodies, to the actual tenements that contain us, to such intimate events as percussion, palpation, the administration of tonics, or the insertion of knife and forceps—why then, you know, we must really insist upon maturity.

Your mere boys may administer our properties, or defend our countries, or even dally gently with our souls. But when it comes to our actual flesh and blood—well, we prefer the assistant or the locum to confine his attentions to the servants, the children, or the very poor. There are exceptions to the rule, no doubt. But I'm afraid that you will find it a very general one. I know that I did. And about the only comfort to be extracted from it is the fact that it may be regarded as an excellent medium for the acquirement of humility. And that's why, if your brothers in the Church or the Army become more lowly in spirit than yourself, it must be

taken to argue in them a greater endowment of natural grace. For their teaching, in this respect, is not likely, I think, to be more thorough than yours. At the same time, there are, as you have just been finding out, some rather bitter moments for the newly fledged medico. I remember once, when I was about twenty-four, I think, and doing a locum in Portsmouth, being called up for the third night in succession to attend a confinement. It was three o'clock in the morning, and the night-bell stirred me out of the profoundest depths of slumber. Very weary, and very bleary, I remember cursing myself by all my gods for having set my hand to so laborious a plough as the pursuit of healing. But later, walking grimly down the empty streets in a pallid drizzle of rain, a certain sense of heroism came to my rescue. After all, it *was* rather a noble thing to be doing; and no doubt my patient would be proportionately grateful. As a matter of solemn fact, on setting eyes upon me, she lifted up her voice, and wept incontinently.

It was a perfectly natural thing to do, of course, in the light of after reflection. She had expected to see the genial, middle-aged physician who had so often attended her; and behold, in his stead, a pale-faced boy who might very nearly

have been her son! It was no wonder that she burst into tears. But it was rather a blow for the poor hero. Afterwards, I think, having both made the best of a bad job, and observed an all-wise Nature introduce to us an entirely normal baby, we became quite friendly. And you will generally find, if you know your work, and refrain from dogma, that a little patience will heal most of these differences, while the cause of them, alas, will depart readily enough. It is good, no doubt, to be considered a wise old codger. But the pearl that pays for it is of great price. So don't be in too much of a hurry to part with it.

Your affect. uncle,

PETER HARDING.

IX

To Harry Carthew, Trenant Hotel, Leeds.

91B, HARLEY STREET, W.,
April 15, 1910.

MY DEAR CARTHEW,

I am very glad. But let me put it to you, sir—that *is* the phrase, isn't it ?—that you really cured yourself.

YRS. very sincerely,
PETER HARDING.

X

To the Rev. Bruce Harding, S. Peter's College, Morecambe Bay.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
April 20, 1910.

MY DEAR BRUCE,

The whole subject is so difficult, and one's opinions upon it, in cold ink as it were, are so liable to be misread, that I wish we could have had a quiet talk about it instead. But of course, since you cannot leave the school until the May holiday begins, and will have, if you decide to take so radical a step, to write to the boys' parents in India and Egypt, this is quite impossible. From your letter I seem to gather that this was your intention at the time of writing, and it is a decision in which I can sympathise with you very deeply.

For the whole ten years during which the school has been in your charge it has, to your almost certain knowledge, and according also to the testimony of many of your old pupils, been absolutely free from this "moral canker," as you

describe it, that you have just discovered in it now. And even for a preparatory school, like yours, this is a record for which you are right to be profoundly thankful. It is one also that naturally throws up into a blacker relief the present condition of affairs. Moreover, having discovered its sphere to be at present fairly circumscribed—confined apparently to a single coterie of some half a dozen boys—the obvious course, as you say, would seem to be a prompt and thorough excision, *pro bono publico*.

And yet I believe that there's a better way—so much better that I am sure, before receiving this, you will have already found it, and abandoned your first decision. You won't expel the youngsters. You'll create instead a public feeling that will cure them. And you'll distribute them in such a way that each will be surrounded by it to his best advantage. I feel so certain that you'll have already made up your mind to do this that I won't put in any special pleading on behalf of these particular nippers or their parents abroad, although I sincerely believe that in taking so drastic a step as you suggest in your letter you would not only be magnifying their offence out of all proportion, but that the result all round would be more than harmful.

Instead, the point that I would most urgently put before you—in spite of many an old drawn battle upon the subject—is that the present little crisis would be an excellent excuse for reconsidering your position as regards giving to your scholars some definite physiological instruction. Because I am quite convinced that at least three-quarters of your moral canker would more properly be defined as physiological curiosity and that the whole problem is only secondarily one of actual perversity. Now your custom up to the present has had, I'll admit, a great deal to recommend it. For your boys come to you very young, usually at the age of nine or ten, shy and imaginative enough perhaps, but for the most part mentally sexless, and with an almost entirely objective outlook upon life. In other words, their inquisitiveness is eccentric rather than concentric. It's a happy condition, and one, as you say, that must be dealt with exceedingly carefully. When they leave you, somewhere about fourteen or fifteen years old, you usually take the opportunity of the good-bye interview to give them some warnings as to confronting moral dangers. But purposely, for fear of prematurely dissipating a desirable innocence, or awakening what you call an illegitimate curiosity,

you keep your advice to generalities in all but the rarest instances. The possible stimulus to dangerous self-exploration in some unsuspecting youngster has always outweighed for you the advantages of a too direct explanation.

And this is where, in spite of your ten years' immunity, I feel sure that your methods have fallen short of the best. Self-exploration is only dangerous when it's blind, and if self-curiosity is ever illegitimate—and I don't see why it should be—we both know that some day or another it is going to become inevitable. We know more, because we are fully aware that some day or another it is going to be satisfied. And for the life of me I cannot see why mere physiological ignorance shouldn't be dispelled in the same routine that is employed for dispelling any other sort of ignorance, mathematical, historical, or what you will. It can be done, I am quite certain, without rubbing a particle off the sweet bloom of childhood, and it will go a very long way in preserving from a much ruder handling that of adolescence and early manhood. For it seems to me that the very fact of refraining from any definite instruction upon what, after all, from the purely physical point of view, is the bed-rock of our *raison d'être*, lends the subject

in advance precisely that air of unnecessary and even shameful mystery which is responsible for about nine-tenths of our prudery on the one hand, and our obscenity on the other.

There's so little original in these reflections, they represent the attitude of so large a number of ordinarily thoughtful persons, that they may probably bore you. But, on the other hand, although there's a good deal of educational spade-work still before us, the day will certainly come, I think, when we shall treat and teach sexual phenomena in the same sane and self-consciousless way as we treat and teach the principles of personal cleanliness and physical hygiene. It will be a great day—may it come soon—and with its dawning will disappear not only the entire stock-in-trade of a not uncommon type of smoking-room raconteur, but a very considerable portion of actual and imaginative immorality. For if you cover up anything long enough, and refer to it slyly enough, you can be certain in the end of making its exposure indecent. If gloves became *de rigueur* for a couple of centuries we should raise prurient titters at the mention of a knuckle. No; it's air and sunlight and the salt of a bracing sanity in these matters that is our crying need.

"The sea," says Mr. Stacpoole in his clever romance "The Blue Lagoon," "is a great purifier," and proceeds, in a little piece of delicate and absolutely true psychology, to describe how Dick, the derelict boy on the coral island, instinctively ran naked with his sister in the presence of winds and waves, although some impulse, born probably of memory, bade him cover himself inland. But his decency was the same in either place.

And it's the sea air of a healthy knowledge and acceptance of these matters that we ought to be pumping through our schoolrooms, our dormitories, and our heart-to-heart talks with our children. Approach them frankly enough, and with no semblance of shamefacedness, and we needn't be afraid, I think, of any evil consequences. The guilty smile, the illicit joke, become disarmed in advance when their subject is treated in the same matter-of-fact and unmysterious fashion as those of geography or astronomy. And that is why, on the whole, I am opposed to the average "purity" volumes that are published for purposes of sexual instruction. For though they acknowledge this to be the solution of a large portion of the problem, they are so written, circulated, and advertised as to suggest

rather an initiation into the unspeakable than a straightforward piece of natural history. And I suspect, as a consequence, that their sales are considerably larger among the prurient than the pious. An older generation was brought up on "Reading without tears." The next should have a companion volume "Biology without shame."

Forgive this sermon, but I have been confronted just lately with such a lot of human mental wreckage, the direct result, in my opinion, of the half-religious, half-fearful shrouds with which we always swaddle up these questions, that I rejoice in an opportunity for their wholesale condemnation. It was Mrs. Craigie, I think, who said that every girl of eighteen should read "Tom Jones." And one can see why, for it is a clean and wholesome history, if a little unspiritual. But her education, like her brother's, should not be left haphazard to the chance reading of a novel, or to the unnecessary blushes with which she ponders certain passages of Scripture.

Well, good-bye, old man, and God bless you. Chat it all over with the young sinners, and then work out a little course of lectures upon the reproduction of species. If you have never talked collectively to a roomful of boys upon the subject before, you will be surprised at the rapt

interest and genuine solemnity with which they will attend to what you have to tell them. And the purity of your school won't suffer, I think, by its change of foundations.

Your affect. cousin,

PETER HARDING.

XI

To Miss Josephine Summers, The Cottage, Potham, Beds.

918 Harley Street, W.,
April 22, 1910.

My dear Aunt Josephine,

I am glad to hear that the ring has been so completely successful in driving away the pains from your joints. I haven't actually heard of the wearing of a ring round the waist for pains elsewhere. But, as you say, it sounds a distinctly hopeful idea. With regard to the pills, so much depends, of course, on what you mean by being worth a guinea. If you are to measure these benefits in actual cash, I believe this amounts to about three farthings. But perhaps that is an unfair standard. No, I don't think that there is the least risk in taking four. I am sorry to hear of your gardener's troubles. But I should hardly have thought that it would be necessary to send him to Torquay. Has it ever occurred to you to suggest that he should sign the pledge ?

Your affect. nephew,

Peter Harding.

XII

To Tom Harding, c/o the Rev. Arthur Jake Rugby.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
April 24, 1910.

MY DEAR TOM,

I have been expecting this letter of yours for a good many weeks. It would be almost true, I think, to say that I have been hoping for it. And yet each week of delay has been making, I believe, for safety. So strongly have I been feeling this last, indeed, that now your letter has actually come, and actually contains to so large an extent the sort of material that I expected to find in it, I am more than glad that you have hesitated so long before writing it. One must always stand away a little from the burning bush to discuss its relations with an everyday world. Close beneath it, in the first apprehension of its significance, there is no room for anything but adoration. And I am afraid this letter of mine, had you received it then, would have seemed to you, if not even a little blasphemous, at any rate lack-

ing in true reverence. For although you haven't told me so, I expect that I shouldn't be far wrong in hazarding a guess that for the first month or two after your experience at Scarborough you told yourself that your father, and perhaps even your mother, were a little wanting in a true understanding of the miracle that had befallen you. It was all so new, so overwhelming; it threw such a strange light not only upon your own individual life, past and to come, but upon the sum total of all other life as well, that you felt its wonder to be almost incompatible with the humdrum, commonplace existence that we and most of our friends appeared to be leading.

Had we known it, as it was then shining upon you, surely we should have been so different! You felt, I think, as if you had suddenly found us out. And though you didn't love us any the less for this—perhaps even loved us more, in another kind of way—you were quite sure that if you hadn't actually outstripped us by this single leap into the light, we had at any rate dropped down a little from the high plane on which, till then, you had never doubted that we lived.

How, for example, in a world that teemed with sin, could the governor be so keen on catch-

ing trout? How was it, with these dark, tremendous millions hemming him in, that you had never seen him hand away a tract, or preach the Word in season? How came it, alas, that he could even sometimes say "damn" when he broke a bootlace, or waste some unreturnable hour over a rubber of bridge? Of course with the mater it was different. Maters *are* different, and I'm glad you thought of that, Tom. But come now, didn't it run somehow in this way? Why naturally it did, and it meant that your discovery had already begotten another. It meant that you had suddenly realised the weak humanity of your parents. But you must try to be kind to it.

And that's how it is with all great discoveries, Tom, in every branch of life. First one is struck with their extraordinary, their dazzling, simplicity. Belief—life; acceptance—salvation; and you had never somehow thought of it before! How simple, and by its very simplicity how godlike, how utterly convincing!

And then, in this new irrefragable conception, everything (even the governor) has to be reconsidered, appraised, condemned, readjusted, and inspired afresh. What is this going to mean to me personally? What does it mean to other people? And again, what responsibility towards

them does its possession entail on myself? These are the inevitable questions that follow. The putting of them is the second stage in the general process. The very fact of their being put at all shows the discovery to be already at work. And the answers, if the discovery is worth anything at all, and we have postulated it to be a great one, can be of only one kind. I must pursue it to the end. I must follow out its leading as far as my humanity will let me. And I must communicate the results to my fellows according to the best of my abilities. That is the third stage, and it is coterminous with life, Tom. Because, you see, all great discoveries, like yours, contain within them the germ-cells of a thousand others. To discover one or two of these, to nourish them, and perhaps even, if one is very fortunate, to enable them in some degree to fructify, is more than a life-work for most of us.

So true is this, and so endless and apparently diverse appear to be their various possibilities, that we are apt very easily (especially in middle life) to forget the splendid, sweeping simplicity of the initial idea, just as we are equally apt to overrate, perhaps, the importance of those particular germs that we have, by temperament and

circumstance, elected to serve, and to underrate the value of those to which our neighbours have been attracted. And it is because of the first of these things that I want to thank you for your letter, and tell you how very much I value it. You have reminded me again of something that I would never like to forget. You have re-created for me the right atmosphere. Belief *is* life, Tom, in a great many more senses than one. Hang on to that like a limpet, and the peace of heart that means strength of hand will never leave you. But it's because of the second of these things that I want you to hesitate just a little longer before you commit yourself to the proposition in your letter.

To be a lay evangelist, something like the gentleman whose services you attended, may be as high and noble a life as any that the world has to offer you. As I conceive it, lived to its greatest advantage, it must be an exceedingly difficult one, which should only of course make it the more worth living. But to say that it is the *best* worth living, while it may be true for yourself, is certainly not true as a general principle. There is no one sort of life that is the best worth living. And in considering the question, as you certainly must, I think you ought to be very

careful to keep this before your mind. Ways in life are not to be selected like articles from a shop-window. You cannot ask for the best, and go away with it in your pocket. The best worth living life is already inside you. And your new discovery is not going to determine its nature—heredity and a thousand other things have already done that—but rather its quality. You may be cut out for a lay, or any other kind of evangelist. I hadn't somehow suspected it in you. But I may easily have been wrong. Yet I think you mustn't take any definite vows upon your shoulders—at any rate, for some time—and probably, I suspect, for several years.

Promises of this sort, you see, are so very much better left unmade. For in the first place, the remembrance of them is more than likely to blur the gladness, and consequent usefulness, with which you will obey your temperament and tendencies in later years, should these determine for you some different course. And in the second, they may even, standing upon some mistaken scruple of conscience, succeed in forcing you, against your real calling, into an altogether unsuitable career.

Meanwhile you need have no fears, I think, in leading your normal, probationary life. You

have the opportunity of University education before you. And that, at any rate, can do you no harm, and will probably be of extreme use to you, whatever your ultimate decision. You want to find out the truth, to impart the truth, and to help your fellow-men to lead better lives. Very well then, if there's a God, Tom, as you and I believe, you must be just the material that He would most greatly care to use. So why not leave it at that for a little while? Want to do the right thing, and so do the next one; and you'll find, I think, that the precise nature of your own particular right thing, evangelist or engineer, will pretty certainly settle itself.

Your aff. father,

P. H.

XIII

To Hugh Pontrex, Villa Rosa, Mentone.

c/o Dr. Robert Lynn,
Applebrook, Devon,
May 3, 1910.

My dear Hugh,

I have just come back to read your letter from one of those super-days of which even the happiest life can contain, I imagine, no more than a handful. Of merely good days I can remember many enough—a sufficient number, at any rate, to absorb very happily the memory of their less favoured brethren. And several of them remain distinct by virtue of some outstanding incident or emotion that they contained or inspired. But most, I think, have become blended into a general peaceable impression of past contentment. To use a popular Americanism, they were good times, and usually real good times at that.

But of these super-days, these Olympians among mundane experiences, no man can expect

very many, and I have been, I suspect, as fortunate as most—in any case so fortunate as to be more than grateful, notwithstanding the tiny, struggling sense in me (a legacy of superstition, I suppose, from some far-back ancestors) that so exquisite an enjoyment must surely prelude some equivalent disaster. They are not, as a rule, I think, critical days, at any rate in the ordinarily accepted sense of the term, though I can remember perhaps a couple that in a small fashion might answer this description.

The first of them was in my fifteenth year, and was the last day (at the end of six weeks' strict training) of the House Races at school. Our four had started bottom of the river, and day by day had crept up until, in the evening of this particular one, we were to row the favourites, School House, for the cup. When I call them the favourites, they were this merely in a sporting sense. Because, I think, the succession of good fights put up by our own insignificant little house, added to a certain reputation for conceit that most School Houses would seem to possess, had won pretty nearly the whole of the rest of the school to our support. As a very junior and inferior oarsman (and I was more than conscious of this at the time, I remember) I can claim no

particular share, other than an accidental one, in this series of victories. I had been one of two candidates for the post of bow, and being a few pounds heavier than my opponent, had managed to secure the thwart. But my mere undeservedness did not lessen—in fact, I think, it enhanced—the almost miraculous sweetness of those wonderful twelve hours. To be gazed at surreptitiously by yet smaller boys in a patently envious admiration; to be patted on the back by older ones who had never hitherto noticed my existence; to be let out of school half an hour earlier by the form-master, with a jocose phrase about privileged heroes—all these things wove a magic round my way that no anxiety about the coming race was strong enough to mar, and that has survived a good many years. Of the race itself I can remember, curiously, nothing but the peculiar hollow echo of our oars as we came through the Town Bridge, and the bare fact that we succeeded in winning, to the supposed vast humiliation of our superior enemies. But what I do remember most distinctly is being invited to tea with the captain, a big man and a monitor. It was a splendid, godlike meal, in which the six weeks' abstention (mistaken, no doubt, but none the less heroic) from

sweets and pastries was utterly forgotten. And there stands out to me the doughnut that dismissed them to oblivion, a doughnut of so succulent a clamminess that it is unlikely, I think, ever to have had its peer—a very Lycidas among doughnuts.

The second day that occurs to me is that in which, playing through, for the first time in many years, to the Finals, the Hospital XV was defeated after a gruelling ninety minutes by the team that represented Guy's. This must have been some eight or nine years later, and its essence is contained in my memory by five perfect minutes, gloriously relaxed, tired but hard, in a hot bath at Richmond.

Now looking back, I know these to have been super-days, and they were, as I have explained, in a very minor sense critical perhaps. But they were exceptions, I think, to the general rule. For though the critical day, the long-looked-forward-to, the apparently, and indeed, chronologically speaking, the really important day may be a good one, and contain great things, yet in later life, at any rate, there is an inseparable anxiety about it of which the super-day knows nothing. The day one qualified, for example, and became by one scratch of the pen licensed to sign death-certifi-

cates, exempt from serving on fire brigades, and worth (on paper) from three to five guineas a week as a locum tenens, was, no doubt, a notable one. The day one proposed oneself in a kind of stammering paralysis as a possible husband to the only possible girl—and was unbelievably accepted; the marriage day; the day when one was appointed to the hospital staff; the day when, in a cool and blinded room, one stooped to kiss the tired but joyful eyes of the first baby's mother—these are the dates over which, most probably, the outside historian would choose to pour the vials of his fancy. But I doubt if in any life these are ever the super-days. They are days to remember; but at the same time they are days that one is glad to have seen closed. They have beheld Destiny too visibly hanging on so desperately fine a balance.

No, they come, these gift-days from the gods, even as they list; and they refuse to be classified. The most constant feature about them, I think, is that they rather generally appear during a holiday. And this, I believe, is because they depend so much on a certain purely bodily fitness. I hesitate a little to be very dogmatic about this, because the older one grows the more spiritual, and consequently deeper, becomes their joy.

And yet, for the majority of us, at any rate, I am certain that the temple must be at least in passable order if the spirit within is to look abroad with an unworried heart, and thoroughly spring-cleaned before its householder, free from domestic cares, can roam joyously at will to find those rarer flowers that he's so seldom free enough to seek. And there lies my stock argument for all misguided religious workers who won't take holidays, and incidentally the real damnation of all systems of monastic self-mortification. A sound body not only means a sound mind, but an untrammelled spirit. For a spirit that has constantly to be down on its knees stopping up some leak in the basement cannot possibly find much time for walking in the garden with God. And if it's a self-made or self-permitted leak, it hasn't even the excuse of being engaged in some equally necessary occupation.

Yet apart from this, there isn't a doubt, I think, that these super-days stand out in memory, and gain their constructive force less by reason of their muscular exaltation than by virtue of their spiritual vision. For even in the days of the doughnut and the hot bath this last wasn't altogether absent. The doughnut marked the closing of an epoch and the dawn of its successor.

It meant the passage—and to a certain extent the conscious passage, too—of an irresponsible childhood into a region of honourable reputation. It was a doughnut that had been bestowed by the hands of a captain. While the hot bath, careless of defeat, merely whispered how great had been the game. And in their successors of later years this spiritual factor has tended to emphasise itself in an ever-growing proportion. Wordsworth might almost have selected the theme, I think, for an Ode on the Intimations of Immortality in Middle Age. I can remember one such day on Butser Hill, during a snatched week-end in Hampshire, and another that is summed up for me in a bend of heather-bordered road, turning, at a hot day's end, towards Stronachlacher and a green lawn above Loch Katrine.

And now, with an equal unexpectedness, there has come the latest of them all.

You know how it goes on a holiday—the holiday, that is, of a man to whom holidays are rare and very blesséd. For the first day your mind has not yet freed itself from town and toil and the hundred other interests for which they stand. Nor has your body quite overcome the lassitude inspired by pavements, and encouraged by taxi-cabs and broughams. Your host, too, wants to

learn the latest tidings from the great metropolis; what So-and-so thinks of the political situation; the prevailing opinion on stocks and shares; the last pronouncements on art and music; the newest good thing in plays. And perhaps even, if you chance to be of the same profession, you fall to talking shop. Not even the magic of plunging streams and deep, rock-shaded pools is quite sufficient, for the moment, to dispel the urban atmosphere that still clings about you. Your unused muscles remind you of the reason for their flabbiness. Your eye, too long engaged upon other sights, is not yet quick enough to mark the swift rise among those ripples at the tail of the pool. And you return from your first day's fishing a little annoyed with yourself, aching as regards the wrist and thigh, and more often than not with a light or empty bag. Yet even so, mark the change in your after-dinner talk! Smoking there round the hall fire, surrounded by rods and guns and cases of fish and game, you no longer deliver yourself of opinions on the rubber market or the precise value of the latest vaccine. You discuss instead the reason why you missed that pounder under Applebrook Bridge. And you sit for long minutes staring through a blue tobacco haze into the wood-fire's heart,

presumably thinking, but in reality doing nothing of the kind. For though the gates of your brain are open, it is to speed rather than receive impressions. And by to-morrow the overcrowded hostel of your mind will be standing with doors ajar for its lustier moorland visitors.

So it has been with me, Hugh, and to-day, the third of my holiday, has been one of those great ones of which I have been writing. Talking sleepily in bed last night to Esther I had announced an intention, received by her with a discreet appearance of belief, of sallying out early to try a couple of those big pools at the junction of the Applebrook and Dart. But the servant with the shaving water found us both comfortably asleep at half-past eight, with two silvery morning hours unfished except in dreams. Dear me, but what a glorious air, and how divine a whisper, too frail to be called a scent, of delicately browning trout!

For old Bob had been up betimes, and, in spite of a powder of frost on the riverside gorse and alders, had succeeded in beguiling half a dozen plump little troutlings into providing the *hors-d'œuvre* to a substantial three-decker breakfast. The family had already made their meal, by the

time we got downstairs, and old Bob, ruddy and contented, surveyed us approvingly from the hearthrug.

"If the sun didn't find you yesterday," he chuckled, "I fancy the breeze did," and Mrs. Bob murmured something to Esther about hazeline ointment. A long round would prevent Bob from doing any more fishing for the rest of the day, but a touch of south in the wind had decided him that Esther and I must settle upon the East Dart for our third day's sport.

"The wind should help you," he said; "and you ought to have a pretty good time," and became forthwith a prophet, though not concerning trout. I'm not going to bother you with details of our angling. It was very arduous, for the wind changed almost as soon as we had started, and blew down the steep valley at a good many miles an hour. But it was at least exciting, and we lunched in a hail-storm on sandwiches and fruit pies, conveyed to us across the moor by Nancy on her pony.

Do you remember Nancy Lynn, a blush-rose little baby-girl a dozen years ago? But I'm sure you do, and I wish you could have seen her to-day as she rode down to us along the steep path to the river, straddle-legged on her Dart-

moor pony, bareheaded, and the colour of a ripe chestnut—lustiest of little animals, but with eyes, as she cuddled her pony's nose, that have already learned to spell mother, and sometimes wonder what it means.

After lunch, Esther went home with her to meet some friends of Mrs. Lynn at tea, and I was to fish a mile or two further up stream, returning later in the evening. But smoking my pipe under the stone wall that had sheltered our meal, it was a long time before I again took up my rod. And instead I sat there under the clearing sky—a great gulf now of tear-washed blue, deepening into an immeasurable calm behind these trivial clouds—and watched the two of them making their leisurely way along the hill. And seen thus, at a little distance, they might very easily have been sisters. There was the same spring in their boyish tread, and, could I have seen it, I have no doubt that there was the same kind of look in their clear, contented eyes. For what Nancy now was, Esther so obviously once had been. And what Esther had become, Nancy in her kind would also grow to be—and subtly, to some small extent, because of Esther. Indeed it might almost have been Esther as she

was, walking pleasantly with Esther as she is, the child's instinct of living only each moment's life, clinging happily to the woman's deeper philosophy of doing precisely the same. I wonder if you see what I'm driving at. It all looks so commonplace on paper. They were really of course two ordinary people, a young girl and a woman, disappearing down a path. But to an elderly physician (a thousand feet up, and on a super-day, mind you) they seemed suddenly to be something rather more. For swinging hands as they walked, half-way between the changing water and the changeless Tor, it was as though now they held visibly between them some mystical arm's-length of the secret core of life—something that was at once common to their age and youth, and was yet apart from both; something, independent of circumstance, that was swinging for a benediction over the years that lay between them. And I'll tell you what it was, Hugh, or at any rate what I knew it to be this afternoon. It was just the Ultimate Truth about things. And behold it was very good!

So that's why I've written you this letter in answer to your sad one of this evening.

For though there is said to be a kind of com-

fort, I believe, in realising that others are suffering like ourselves, I doubt if this is ever a comfort worth having. And, on the other hand, there *is* a certain amount of real satisfaction in knowing, at the end of a blank day, that your neighbour, at any rate, has had a bit of luck. And so because you write to me *de profundis*, your bronchial mucous membrane being more than usually congested, I'm deliberately crowing to you from my little hill-top. But there's another reason, Hugh. Do you remember, twelve years ago, facing me on Bellever Bridge, and holding out to me a lean brown hand to grasp? I was there this afternoon, and that nice sunburnt girl has now got a family of six.

"Peter," you said to me, "this has been a great day. It has been worth living for. I wouldn't have missed it for whatever's got to come. And if you're a real pal you won't let me forget that."

And so I have reminded you. That was one of *your* super-days, and you chose to make it your throne of judgment upon life. And you were right, Hugh, because you judged by the best, and life, like genius, must always be greater than even its highest gifts to us. Some day, when

I too am glowering upon it from the windward side of a bronchitis-kettle, I hope there'll be an equally tactful fellow to remind me of this. Perhaps you'll be the fellow.

Ever yours,

P. H.

XIV

To Miss Molly Harding, 91B Harley Street, London, W.

c/o Dr. Robt. Lynn,
Applebrook, Devon,
May 6, 1910.

My dear Housekeeper,

Twenty years ago your mother and I came down here for a fortnight's fishing to stay, just as we are staying now, and in the same month, too, with Bob Lynn and his wife. I remember that we wondered for quite six weeks if we could properly afford to do this. The house, you see—not 91B, but the tiny one at the end of Devonshire Street—had been so very costly in its demand for furniture, for rent, for wear and tear. The practice was so uncertain, seemed so desperately slow in growing. Was it safe to leave it? Would it be still there when we returned? And if not——?

So we argued, and knew all the time that there was a far more important consideration than any of these tucked away in the upstairs part of our

minds. Was it safe to leave her at only ten months old? Would she know us again when we came back? Could any one in the world take a great enough care of her?

Perhaps you have never guessed what an important little person she was; and perhaps, even now, you decline, in that very calm and unimpassioned habit of yours, to believe it. But that must be because you have never properly studied the evidence. I wonder if you have ever seen, for instance, the clothes that she wore—such little clothes, but just look at them, every stitch as delicate as a tendril, and every dimple and pucker as soft as a wild bird's nest. There's never more than one person in the world who can make clothes like that; and nobody, not even her husband, knows where she learned the secret. And if this were only the husk, what then about the plump little kernel inside?

I can remember the long discussions, and how at last two cold-blooded physicians, the one in Devonshire and the other in town, had their own way, and forced a mother from her babelet for two long, if health-giving, weeks. I can remember the arrival of a Miss Sarah Harding—admirablest of lay-mothers (God bless them all)—to take up her awful charge; and the hour or so

during which she received instructions enough to cause a less iron brain to melt upon its pan. But she was a wonderful woman even then, and *somebody* had to take care of the child.

And now, with a trifling difference or two, here's history repeating itself in the oddest manner possible, father and mother flown down again to Devonshire, and somebody offering, in their absence, to take care of Miss Molly—but for rather longer than a paltry two weeks; and please what do we think of it?

By the same post, too, comes a brief, apologetic sort of letter from the candidate himself. He had meant to wait for another year or so before suggesting himself as even a possible caretaker, only as it happened last night at Lady Pearson's she was looking, etc. etc.—and you know how these things will get the better of a chap, etc. etc.—and, well, there it was, don't you know; and now it is all upon the knees of the gods. Or of one little goddess, did he mean to say? Because that of course is where it really is, as you both know very well indeed, in spite of your pretty letters to us, which have made your mother and me feel at once very elderly and happy and anxious (in a not too unpleasant sense) and also—do you mind?—vicariously honoured.

I doubt if I am looking at the matter quite eye to eye with the W.S.P.U. when I say this; but you'll have to forgive me, I think, especially as it's your Daddy's opinion that you ask for, and not theirs. So I'll tell you just what I felt when I read your letter, and comprehended its tidings.

1. Dear me, is she really as old as that?
2. Then what am I?
3. *O tempus edax rerum!*
4. But it's really rather gratifying.
5. Because after all there are so many nice girls in the world.
6. And yet it's *my* girl that he would like to marry.
7. *Our* girl, please. (This from Esther.)

You see how primitive we become in these little crises of life.

And I think, if you really want to have my very particular message to you about this, it is—don't mind being a little primitive yourself.

On the whole, perhaps, I am not able to prescribe this as often as I should like; and chiefly because, I suppose, the young couples that come to me for an opinion on matrimony are not as a rule normal young couples. They have usually been sent, that is to say, by some wise or anxious

guardian who has foreseen for them some probable disaster. And often enough I have had to beseech them for their own good and for the unborn others to let their reason lay aside their passion—not without tears.

Now, I believe I know you well enough to be right in saying that the—shall I call it the strictly eugenic ?—side of the question is not likely to suffer from your neglect. Newnham and the W.S.P.U. will have taken care of that. Nor is there anything, in the present case, to trouble you from this point of view. For Arthur Lynn is a sound, healthy, athletic young man, four years your senior, of good stock and sufficiently satisfactory means and prospects. Both physically and in every other way he would be a desirable husband for you. And all this, as I gather from your letter, you have been very carefully, and very rightly, considering. Moreover you can be quite sure—you probably *are* quite sure—that there is no one whom your mother and I would sooner have for a son-in-law, as I am writing to tell him this evening.

No, my dear, I don't think that your danger lies in a too slender application of reason to the problem before you. It lurks, if anywhere, in a too great disregard of what is often supposed to

be its antithesis. And I should like you to have written to me, not only that you were 'naturally pleased, of course, if a little perplexed,' but that you were *thrilled*. To which, no doubt, you will reply that in the first place you're not the sort of young woman that indulges in thrills, and in the second that, had you done so, you would certainly never have committed the fact to paper. But I should have read it between the lines. Ah, Molly, don't ever be *too* afraid of thrills. For at the worst (the most *bourgeois*) they are at any rate evidences of life, not only within but without—some all-pervading force, short-circuited for a moment through your own awakened consciousness to that old, old world on which you stand; while at the best—well, who shall say from what unseen Vessel the current has its birth?

> Could I find a place to be alone with heaven,
> I would speak my heart out; heaven is my need.

Was it like that with you, Molly? Because that is how I would have it for you, my dear. And I think it is worth waiting for, not for a week only, as you have suggested to Arthur, but for far longer than that. You will tell me, very likely, and with perfect truth, to remember that

wherever marriages may be said to have their hypothetical origin, in actual practice they must needs evolve upon earth. And that's a side of the question, no doubt, that a good many people are inclined to forget. But you're not one of them. And I should like you to give Heaven a chance, not only for your own sake, but for your future husband's, whoever he may ultimately be. Husbands need a little halo, you see, at any rate to begin with. And that's why I should like you to wait awhile—say six months or so—even at the risk of causing young Lynn a little gentle (but quite harmless) unhappiness. And when—and if—he comes to you then (for you mustn't allow him to promise) let your heart have no doubt in its yes.

Your affect. father,

P. H.

XV

To Miss Josephine Summers, The Cottage, Potham, Beds.

91B Harley Street, W.,
May 16, 1910.

My dear Aunt Josephine,

It is certainly very wrong of Claire not to have written to thank you for the mittens. As you say, colds in the head are quite common in the months of May and June, and I have no doubt that if she wears them, as you suggest, whenever she goes out to play, they will keep her hands very warm indeed. I hope that you will hear from her in a day or two. With regard to the vicar's boy, I think, from what I remember of him, that you can quite safely leave him in the hands of the vicar's very wise housekeeper and your own excellent doctor. I doubt too if he would ever really constantly wear the flannel cholera-belt that you have been making for him; and in any case, I think a temporary abstinence from butter-scotch would be an even more effective measure. Your doctor is quite right about the

tomatoes. There is no evidence to show that they cause cancer. But of course one must always be careful not to eat too many of them. No, the gravel from which, I am sorry to hear, the new lay-reader suffers has nothing to do with that which is found in gardens. And it is quite sufficient, as you say, to account for a little occasional hastiness in his temper. We are all glad to hear that you have been so busy and comparatively well, and both Esther and Molly join me in sending you their best love.

Your affect. nephew,

PETER HARDING.

XVI

To Lady Wroxton, The Manor House, Stoke Magna, Oxon.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
May 23, 1910.

MY DEAR LADY WROXTON,

I was very glad, as were we all, to hear from you again after so long a silence, and gladder still to learn that the pleasant peacefulness of Stoke is doing its good work on your behalf so surely, if still a little slowly. For both from your own letter and that of Dr. Rochester I can see that the spirit of you is climbing back again towards the light, less lonely than you would have thought possible six months ago, and into an air as clear even as that which you and your husband breathed together before he was taken from you. I think that I know how hard must be the ascent, although in my own perhaps too peaceful life I have had little enough experience of these swift and terrible bereavements, that will come to me also, I must suppose, in their due time. And it is only from the share,

sometimes completely professional, sometimes rather more intimate than this, that I have been called upon to take in such experiences of others that I seem to have learned a very little about the tides of grief.

Looking down upon the dead face, touching the cold hand, lifting up the leaden arm, one cannot help feeling how utterly dead a dead man looks, an impression enormously deepened, as a rule, by the circumstances of the last days. For in these his external, his spiritual activities have been, of necessity almost, set aside, and perhaps temporarily forgotten in the paramount appeals of his body itself. Now this organ, now that, must be attended to, supported, cleansed, stimulated, implored, as it were, to fulfil its duty towards the struggling economy of the whole. And as an almost inevitable result their slender responses, their final refusals, have obsessed both patient and friends to the exclusion of everything else. The bodily case, so long taken for granted, and now so fast giving way, has become no longer a subordinate, but the predominant factor in its owner's entity. So that when the body, *Imperator et Dux* of these later hours, at length lays down its sceptre, it's a small wonder if all else has appeared to die with it. Nor for a time

can the formulæ of the churches seem anything but unreal, however humbly a schooled faith may try to accept their verity. The dead thing beneath the sheet seems to weigh down the balance with a fact too stark for disputation. Of the earth earthy, it is committed to the earth, resolving presently into its elements—and who shall tell its number any more?

Between mere friends, the friend taken and the friend left, this bodily dissolution has perhaps a less grim significance, or makes, at any rate, a smaller demand on faith. We loved our friend for his ways, his wit, his kindliness, his character, and not very particularly for his cast of feature or mould of physique. But where friendship has allied itself with passion, where the actual flesh has meant much, where souls have spoken, not only in sight and speech, but in touch and fast embrace, the death of the flesh must necessarily seem to involve so infinitely more—enough almost to justify mediæval thought in demanding, for its consolation, a belief in the resurrection of the body. And as a result the well-meant advice of physicians and friends must appear at these times to be entirely inadequate—I was almost going to say impertinent—because it must necessarily be only half informed.

And yet I am not sure that we, standing at a distance (and perhaps even because of this), have not, after all, the real comfort in our hands. To you, from whose close touch the alabaster box has slipped, its breaking has seemed to mean the end of all things. You were so near to it. And how irreparable was its fracture no eyes but yours could tell. So what can we others say to you that can be of any value in your sorrow?

Well, we can at least say this—that its perfume is still upon the air, its real gift to us and our great and permanent possession. It may be easier for us—his mere friends—to declare thus that we haven't really lost him. But given a little time it will become possible even to you, who were heart of his heart. And if there's no older—and perhaps colder—truism than this, yet it has a very sound and, I believe, an actually physical basis. For if we grant, as we needs must, that the material body is ever changing, cell replacing cell by a continuous process of wasting and repair, so that the substance containing us to-day is by no means identical with that which contained us, as it were, yesterday, why then the cells that called out for the physical sight and touch of those other cells that sur-

rounded him we loved must necessarily pass also upon their journey, and with them, to a very great extent, their anguish of unsatisfied desire. This is why, I think, nothing becomes more absolutely obliterated than a dead passion that has been merely bodily; and why also, in most other cases where passion has been a factor, the diminution of grief must be regarded as a completely natural process and one that implies no shadow of disloyalty. It merely means that the sense of loss has been transferred to another and more spiritual plane, where, lo! it even appears at times to have been scarcely a loss at all; but instead a withdrawal, so obviously transient as to be itself an evidence of some certain, if incomprehensible reunion. With his memories so thronging, with the visible and abiding evidences of his activities so implicit in the growth of his successors, how little, after all, has become the value of the vessel that contained him! Am I right? Isn't it going with you somehow in this fashion?

But, dear me, if your power of sleep were not returning to you so rapidly, you would be imagining this some subtle form of prescription by epistle.

And that was one of the best bits of news

in your letter, besides being the chief reason why you mustn't, I think, come back to town just yet, even at the risk of disappointing Hilary and Norah. For Sleep's a fickle goddess when she once goes wandering, and the way to woo her home is not to woo her at all. Seek her not, and she will come stealing back to you round the corner to know the reason why. And there's no place like the country and some quiet garden therein in which to declare your war of independence.

For, as I told you before, sleeplessness *per se* has never killed anybody yet; and where nothing but the rising and setting of stars, and the opening and closing of flowers need call for your attention, you can very comfortably afford to snap your fingers at it in defiance. But in town it would be different. Your days would become, in spite of yourself, so automatically exacting that you would of necessity demand respite from your nights—the very demand that, just at present, you mustn't be obliged to make. At Stoke, on the other hand, it doesn't matter (and the more you insist on this the better), it doesn't matter a bit where, when, or how much, you sleep. The very air of the place is a far too bewitching, and incidentally a quite adequate,

substitute; while for dreams you have the whole cycle of field and garden husbandry spread out before your eyes, as little changing as the downs themselves, and like them pretty nearly "half as old as time." So watch it for a year, day in and day out, and leave the turmoils and telephones of London to such unfortunate and envious friends as P. H., of medicinal memory.

As regards the girl you sent up to me from the village last Friday, I have taken her into one of my wards at the Hospital, where I fancy a little careful dieting will soon set her right again. At the same time I may take the opportunity of examining the defaulting organ by means of a very ingenious instrument just devised by two of my junior colleagues. It's a toy—it's going to be much more than that—that would have delighted your husband's heart, and by its means, down a bent tube, inserted through her mouth, fitted with a tiny electric lamp and reflectors at the angles, I shall be able not only to peep into her stomach, but to survey it as thoroughly and particularly as I am now able to inspect her tongue. Even so do the youngsters show us the way!

Yes, you are quite right. Anæmia, dyspepsia,

gastric ulcer seem to be the special afflictions of the under-housemaid. And it's the damnable habit of providing her with "kitchen" tea, and "kitchen" butter, and "kitchen" food of all sorts that is largely responsible for this, not only directly, but indirectly, in that it tempts her to indulge in various kinds of unhealthy in-between meals. Surely the servants who work for us, and feed us, and keep us clean, should be at least as well and as carefully fed as ourselves, even if they wouldn't be quite happy, perhaps, to sit at our own tables. And the careless (and I'm afraid doubtful) ladies who think otherwise should be made to undergo a spell of domestic dieting in their own establishments.

Esther and Molly, who are at home, join me in sending you their very best love and hopes for a near-at-hand complete recovery; and, if you can really put up with them, nothing will make Tom and Claire happier than to spend a week or two of their summer holidays at Stoke.

Your sincere friend,

PETER HARDING.

P.S.—You must try to forgive me for this rambling and rather inconsequent letter, but I

have been both inflicting and enduring, for the last ten days, a superfluity of full-dress lectures. So I have been writing to you, as a result, in my mental shirtsleeves.

XVII

To Miss Sarah Harding, The Orphanage, Little Blessington, Dorset.

Hotel Moderne, Lourdes,
June 7, 1910.

My dear Sally,

I have just encountered one of those strange half-accidents that crop up like rocks in the quiet stream of one's everyday life just where a rock is the least likely to be. You turn the bend from Tuesday into Wednesday, and hey presto, before you know what's happened, your little canoe has been shot out of the main current into some unsuspected channel, whence it emerges presently as from a waking dream.

Last week as I went into the club between an afternoon at the hospital and two evening visits in Kensington, I met Bettany, of whom you may perhaps have heard me speak. A quite successful Government official, he contrives also to edit one of the leading Roman Catholic newspapers and incidentally to organise with conspicuous ability periodical pilgrimages to various

Continental shrines. He is a man who has always interested me, partly because he has seemed to me to possess in a very marked degree one of the strongest and most challenging characteristics of his Church—the habit, even in matters of religion, of completely dissociating the man from his function. A ladder for the faith of other people need not necessarily have any faith of its own—and be an extremely serviceable ladder for all that. In his particular case, a belief in the miraculous powers of those relics and waters to which he enables the faithful so comfortably to travel, is not, I think, *de fide*—demanded by his Church. In any case he does not possess it, but regards the whole phenomenon through his gold-rimmed spectacles with an entirely amiable, and of course very discreet, scepticism. At the same time his talent for organisation and his unique knowledge of Continental hotels and railways are entirely at the disposal of his more credulous brethren. And his name must be known in this connection to many thousands of Catholics on both sides of the Channel.

On this particular evening he told me that he was extremely busy making the final arrangements for what promised to be the largest English pilgrimage that has yet travelled to Lourdes.

And then, remembering suddenly, I suppose, that I was a doctor of medicine, he sat bolt upright and said, "By George, you're the very man that can help me." For it seemed that there were so many invalids going out with the party—at least forty, he told me—some of whom were in a very bad way, that it had appeared desirable to take a medical man in case of emergencies upon the long journey. And did I know of anyone who would care to go? He had already made some inquiries, he said, among Catholic medical friends, but hadn't as yet found anyone who had been able to undertake the duties. He was not in a position to offer anything more than travelling expenses; and he was beginning, as a consequence, to feel rather doubtful about finding a man in time. It was not essential, he considered, that the accompanying physician should be himself a Catholic, provided that he was reasonably sympathetic; and then, reading my thoughts, I suppose, he asked me if I should be sufficiently interested to make the little trip myself.

Well at first, of course, this seemed quite out of the question; but on looking through my engagements I began to think that with a certain amount of arrangement it might become possible

after all. We were to leave Charing Cross at ten o'clock on Friday morning, and would be home by the following Thursday night. And it was to be quite understood that I was coming not as an official, but only as a visitor who would be willing, if necessary, to render aid *en route*—all of which goes to account for the address upon my notepaper, and the fact that I seem at this moment to be very much more than eight hundred miles from Harley Street.

Joining the train at Charing Cross, it was quite obvious to me that a very considerable proportion of the party was Irish—the sing-song western accent was everywhere—and that a comparatively large number of priests would be travelling with us. Most of these I have since discovered to be genial, even hilarious, souls, drawn, as it appears, from every stratum of society, and differing, as a consequence, very greatly both in real education and superficial polish.

It was not until we got on board at Folkestone that I had a first opportunity of becoming acquainted with the sick people of the assembly; and by this time I was already conscious of being surrounded by some curious, indefinable atmosphere, that was walling us away from what to me, with my half-Protestant, half-scientific

upbringing, represented the everyday world. I doubt if many of my fellow-pilgrims felt this. But I am certain that the other passengers on the boat did. And it was both odd and a trifle amusing to observe the blank expressions upon numerous well-fed and monocled countenances on their way to a normal Paris. Yet from my own point of view I had to admit that there was a good deal of excuse for them. For we might all, as it seemed to me, very easily have stepped out of the Middle Ages.

Of the more obvious invalids there were none, as far as I could see, who stood the smallest chance of benefiting, in a material sense, from their visit to Lourdes. There were two blind girls, both cases of congenital organic disease—and who both chanced, by the way, to be among the very few sufferers from sea-sickness. There was a little boy from a Sussex village, a case of infantile paralysis, brought by his mother in the fervent hope, as she told me, that Our Lady would use him as a means to convert an extremely Nonconformist community. There was an older girl, similarly affected; and an elderly man, travelling quite alone, in almost the last stages of cancer of the throat. With this poor fellow, who was almost too weak to stand unaided,

I had a long and very pathetic conversation. He knew himself to be past all human aid, and was journeying from his home on the east coast to the shrine upon the Gave as to his last anchorage upon life. And I doubt, even so, if he had any real belief in its efficacy for himself. But his journey, a really enormous effort for a man in his condition, would at any rate show that he had had courage enough to make the trial. His is the only case that has given me cause for any immediate anxiety, and were it not for his extraordinary pluck and will-power I should be more than doubtful about getting him home alive.

Of the other invalids, none were sufficiently apparent to disclose themselves to me in a cursory tour round the ship with Bettany; and after making the poor cancer patient as cosy as possible in the special train that was waiting for us at Boulogne, I repaired to the very comfortable carriage reserved for us, and shared an excellent lunch with Bettany, his lady secretary, and another member of the committee. The journey to Paris was uneventful, and after manœuvring round its southern suburbs, we found ourselves about seven o'clock in the Gare d'Orléans, where a portion of the refreshment-room had been reserved for our dinner. During this meal

I was introduced by Bettany to the Bishop who is leading the pilgrimage—one of those rare men of whose essential saintliness one becomes instantly aware, yet a man, too, of abundant strength, and one, as I have since found out, capable of ensuring, with the profoundest personal humility, the utmost tribute of respect to the high office that he represents. I suppose every Church contains such men. It is at any rate pleasant to think so. But not all are wise enough to make them bishops—and missionary bishops at that.

The same train left Paris with us about nine o'clock on the long journey to Lourdes; and after some desultory conversation we made ourselves comfortable for the night. Fortunately, since our train was not of the corridor type, the sick persons seemed to settle down pretty easily, and the chief impressions that remain to me of the journey are a peep into a cool and cloudless sunrise over some vineyards between Poitiers and Angoulême and a very satisfactory *café complet* at Bordeaux. Two or three times during the morning, both before and after reaching this place, we were jeered at by onlookers at various wayside stations, who had read the inscription *Pèlerinage* upon our carriage; and one or two of

these had even gone so far as to throw stones. They were reminders, I suppose, that here in Lourdes seem almost incredible, of the enormous extent to which the anti-clerical movement has permeated elsewhere in France. The latter part of our journey, climbing slowly into the Pyrenees, was enlivened for us by the presence of the Bishop, who had given up his own carriage to some indignant Irish pilgrims that had been so unfortunate as to have spent a sleepless night. Haymaking was already in full swing in these steaming valleys, with men and boys and bare-legged, brown-faced women all backs down over what seems to be a very plentiful crop.

. . . . .

I have just here been tapped on the shoulder by an immaculately apparelled American Catholic, who has just joined the pilgrimage from Florence. He had learned, he told me, that I was a physician willing to oblige. He suffered a little from gout, he said, and then proceeded to pose me with the rather difficult question as to how often he ought to take the waters.

I explained to him that, as far as I knew, these have none but an ethical value—a reply that obviously puzzled him.

"You mean," he inquired at last, "that it's ENtirely a matter of faith?"

"Precisely," I answered, and his brow cleared a little.

"Do you think I might have a Seidlitz powder to go on with?" he asked.

. . . . . .

We arrived at Lourdes at about four o'clock on Saturday afternoon, after just thirty hours' travelling, and landed into a seething tumult of departing pilgrims, bullock-wagons, carriages, and electric trams. Losing sight of Bettany, I found myself looking vaguely round for some kind of conveyance, in company with the Bishop and his chaplain; and between us we managed to secure also a seat for our poor fellow-traveller from Essex, for whom we afterwards discovered a moderately quiet bedroom in our hotel.

After tea, the Bishop asked me to accompany him in a stroll round the town and shrine, during which I learned a little about Lourdes, and a good deal about my companion. Half-way between the plains and the higher ranges of the Pyrenees, Lourdes itself lies in a valley, bisected by the Gave, a tumbling mountain stream that supplies the holy water to the grotto and the

piscines, or invalid baths. The town itself, with its narrow, winding streets, strung, as it were, between the fourteenth-century chateau on the one side and the nineteenth-century church that surmounts the shrine, on the other, is quite the most remarkable combination of mediævalism and modernity that I have seen; while its crowded, ever-changing population must be, I suppose, the saddest, oddest, and perhaps the most unique in both the hemispheres. As we walked down towards the shrine, we met returning most of those who had gathered round the great square for the daily blessing of the sick; and passing through them we must have heard, I should think, almost every dialect of Europe, Flemish perhaps predominant, since this was the last day of a great Belgian pilgrimage, but German, Italian, English, Spanish, and of course French, at nearly every step.

Every now and again, too, some ardent man or woman, seeing the big amethyst ring on my friend's finger, would kneel down to kiss it and receive his blessing, caring nothing for his difference of language and nationality, and everything for his holy office in their common church. Once or twice he smiled gently when they had gone their fervent way, clasping their votive candles

or little bottles of sacred mountain water, and once I ventured to press him a trifle as to his personal faith in the Lourdes miracles. But he was a statesman, as I discovered, no less than a saint, and would confess to no more than a belief that these dear people obtained perhaps a score of spiritual to each merely temporal favour. And surely these were after all the better ?

The actual grotto, where fifty-two years ago the little Bernadette saw her visions of the Blessed Mary, lies now about a hundred yards from the river's edge, along which a palisaded embankment has been built, that is apt however, after sudden storms, to be pretty often under water. It is really a cave set in a large rock around which, one above the other, have since been built three churches, the topmost, with its tall and slender spire, being perhaps the most prominent landmark for a good many miles around. With its walls polished by the elbows and fingers of countless thousands of pilgrims, this little cavern contains an altar before which, in the open air, are ranged several rows of seats for worshippers at the shrine, and where, as I afterwards learned from a disappointed Irish priest, it is considered a very special privilege to say Mass.

Next to the grotto are the baths, where the

sick are immersed, and from which bottles of the holy water can be carried away to all parts of the world; and to the left and above this is the great church, the lowest and largest of the three that now surmount the rock. The entrance to this church stands upon a broad terrace above the immense open amphitheatre, about which, in a circle some half a mile in circumference, gather the sick people and their helpers and relations for the afternoon passing of the Host. It is at this ceremony that the majority of the miracles take place, of which, I suppose, the crutches, splints, spinal jackets, and other surgical appliances that hang rusting among the wild geraniums over the entrance to the grotto are to be taken as partial evidences.

There were still some poor sufferers waiting outside the *piscines*, and a few others praying before the grotto; and pausing for a moment to watch them and the various passers-by, one could not help being very forcibly struck with the all-pervading atmosphere of pity. Sights that elsewhere would have been veiled from the daylight are here frankly exposed, not to a kind of shuddering, if sympathetic horror, but as pitiful, broken flowers to be gathered up, and laid with prayers upon the altar of mercy. We concluded

our little tour with a visit to the Bureau des Contestations, the offices where the doctors attached to the grotto—one of them an Englishman—receive and classify the histories of the cures, examine the alleged *miraculés*, deprecating the excited allegations of some, postponing their verdicts upon others, and recording what seem to them, among a host of claims, to be genuine cases of Divine interposition. Both the doctors present when we arrived, and to whom Bettany, who had joined us, now introduced me, were extremely courteous and only too anxious to lay before me all the material at their command. Both, as I could see at once, were men accustomed to deal with human nature of the type and under the conditions that Lourdes presents, and it was therefore with very great diffidence that I found myself even mentally criticising their results. Nevertheless it is true, I think, that nothing approaching to ordinary, exact scientific observation, as the modern medical world understands it, is carried out at Lourdes; I doubt indeed if it would be possible; and I saw no instance, either then or later, of a Lourdes cure that could not be explained upon the observed and established lines of mental suggestion, or, apart from this, could bear a thorough cross-examination. Need-

less to say, the two doctors, both ardent and devout Roman Catholics, entirely disagreed with me, and assured me that after twenty years at the shrine they were only the more convinced of Our Lady's blesséd and material favours. And perhaps, after all, it is merely a question of terminology.

But it is not until one has actually seen the procession of the Host at the afternoon service in the amphitheatre that one has penetrated, as it were, into the very heart of Lourdes. And so it was not, perhaps, until three o'clock on the next afternoon that I found myself laid under the full power of the strange, half-intoxicating, half-repellent spell of this almost passionately fervent and yet at the same time strangely commercial factory of miracles. All the morning, ever since the very early hours, special trains had been rolling into the station, carrying, as we learned at breakfast, a pilgrimage, ten thousand strong, from the towns and villages of Toulouse. At every turn we met them, groups of swarthy, and for the most part stunted, men and women, with sombre, toil-worn faces, yet lit, in the majority of cases, with a deep-burning and almost apostolic faith. Gathered about their parish priests, buying rosaries and trinkets, little images of Bernadette Soubirous (sold by her numerous

relatives, most of whom have already, in one way and another, made considerable fortunes out of her vision), they filled the narrow streets to overflowing, ardent, undoubting, agog for the least whisper of some strange and fortunate miracle. And needless to say such whispers were plentiful enough. Just before noon, for instance, an apple-faced sister, collecting money from the more prosperous visitors at such hotels as ours for the free hostelries that are open elsewhere to the poor, told us with beaming smiles of a poor girl, with a large ulcer upon her arm that had resisted all treatment for years. Last night she had dipped it into the waters, and lo, this morning the disease had utterly vanished, and her skin was as the skin of a little child! There is a young priest here, a fine, upstanding fellow, who is a qualified doctor, and has been a house-surgeon at one of our London hospitals. He is trying hard, I can see, to square his scientific prejudices, as he would call them, with his religious desire to believe in these miracles. And at this he turned to me with something of triumph.

"If we could only find her out now," he said, "how would you account for that?"

But on closer inquiry we discovered, alas, that the sister had not herself seen the ulcer before

the cure was wrought; and later on in the day the doctors at the bureau assured me that no reports of such an incident had reached them. And we never succeeded in finding the girl, although the rumour of her cure had already spread like wildfire, and will soon, no doubt, be reported as a definite miracle in cottages a thousand miles from here.

In such an atmosphere then, and under a cloudless, burning sky, we gathered in the afternoon, some fourteen thousand strong, in a vast circle before the steps of the grotto church. Quite early the *brancardiers*, a self-appointed order of workers, who assist in transporting the sick, had been busy bringing their charges to the great square; so that the innermost row of the waiting host was already entirely composed of sufferers praying to be healed. Marching up and down before them, clad in their robes of office, were the various priests who had come with them, telling their beads, and invoking the multitudes to prayer. As doctor to our own little party, Bettany enabled me to step within the ring, and walking with him, before the service, I made a slow round of the circle, beholding such a clinic as could be seen, I suppose, nowhere else in the world—the clinic of Our Lady of Lourdes, and

one that seemed to me to contain, on this particular afternoon, pretty nearly every malady under the sun.

"Seigneur, Seigneur, ayez pitié de moi." "Mein Herr und mein Gott." "Lord save us, or we perish." "Hail, Mary, blessed among women." "Seigneur, Seigneur, ayez pitié de moi." In every tongue, as we walked round, the age-old cries for mercy rang in our ears, from a faith that it was impossible to doubt, and from a depth of human need that here, at any rate, nothing short of the Divine might satisfy.

Presently, just as we had made our way back to our own little party, of whom many, hitherto unsuspected, had now, by kneeling in the front row, tacitly declared themselves to be in need of physical healing, a new and solemn sound began to break upon our ears—the sonorous chanting of men's voices on the way up from the grotto in a long and slow procession. "Ave, Ave, Ave Maria," marching four abreast they now came into sight, bearing lighted candles in their hands, and in an apparently endless succession, to turn presently into the great empty space about which the rest of us were gathered. Up the centre of this they now marched, all the able-bodied men of the Toulouse pilgrimage, accompanied by

many of their priests, singing the Lourdes hymn, and massing themselves at last upon the broad terrace before the grotto church. Some twenty minutes it must have taken for them thus to file past us; and finally, under a canopy borne by four stalwart attendants, came the officiating priest, clad in his heavy and gorgeous robes, and bearing before him the golden, flame-shaped monstrance in whose centre rested, as all this expectant gathering believed, the actual and visible body of the Christ Himself. As they passed us I could see that the arduous task, under this thrilling June sun, of thus holding up his Saviour to each of these thousand sufferers had fallen to our own Bishop—the highest dignitary of the Church, I suppose, who happens just now to be in Lourdes. As he moved slowly up the centre of the hot amphitheatre the cries of the poor *malades* and their friends redoubled themselves in ardour. "Seigneur, Seigneur, ayez pitié de moi." The tides of adoration rose and fell and rose again until, as step by step he passed along the circle, they climbed up to a crest of almost agonising entreaty. "Lord, save us. Lord, save us, or we perish." To left and right we could hear the broken voices sobbing their prayers to God, and even among our more stolid

English sufferers could see the tears running down the uplifted worshipping faces. Watching the Bishop, as at last, after perhaps half an hour, his laboured progress brought him opposite to ourselves, I could not help feeling how great must be the burden now bearing upon his shoulders, since apart from the actual physical strain, the continual stooping, in his thick robes and with his heavy monstrance, over patient after patient in this thunderous heat, the emotional tax must have been enormous. For upon him and That which he bore there impinged now the whole sum of these heart-wrung supplications. Upon his vicarious shoulders he must carry, as it were, the multitudinous petitions of all these kneeling thousands. And yet it was just this, as afterwards, in the cool of the hotel, he assured me, that was his chief support. Upborne by all this simple and unshakable belief, it was only then that he was beginning to feel the bodily weariness that the long procession had entailed upon him. So step by step he passed upon his way, until, more than an hour later, the long round had been at last completed. And it was then, in a momentary silence that followed the conclusion of his passage, that from the far end of the circle a little cry arose, and a woman, bedridden, as we

afterwards learned, for more than fourteen years, rose up from her chair, and tottered out into the space before her. Instantly the cry was everywhere abroad, "A miracle, a miracle"; and like a leaf on the wind of ten thousand shoulders, she was being borne in an ecstasy of triumph towards the Bureau des Constatations.

It was here, an hour later, that I saw her, a gentle-faced, devout little peasant woman, about whose past history the evidence seemed fairly conclusive. Smiling at us, she took a few steps across the room among the uplifted hands and eager exclamations of the assembled priests. But, alas, there would appear to be no physical reason why she should not have walked thus at any time during her invalid years, if only some stimulus, sufficiently effective, had been applied to her before.

Making my way slowly back to the hotel for tea, I was touched on the arm by a young French priest to whom I had spoken earlier in the day. He had been lamenting the great wave of godlessness that has seemed for the moment to submerge the whole of France. But now his eyes were shining. "Is it not wonderful," he cried, "to see all this so great faith?" He moved his hands expressively. "Ah, *la belle* France, the heart of her

people is still hungry for its God—and some day —some day it will lift Him up again for all the world to see." And in the evening I saw him once again at what was perhaps, after all, the great climax of the Lourdes day.

Sipping my coffee with Bettany at a small boulevard near the hotel, we had already seen hundreds of little points of flame gathering out of the growing darkness towards the grotto and its churches. And this evening procession of candle-bearing pilgrims marks perhaps the last word—if I may quite reverently put it so—in the stage-management of Lourdes. For at a given signal not only do a thousand slender lamps pencil out in gold and red and blue the uplifted tapering spire and every arch and pinnacle of the church upon the rock; but a couple of miles away, and three thousand feet high on the crest of the Pic du Ger, a great cross, illuminated by a battery from the town, springs suddenly out into the sky. The outline of the hill itself, and behind it the snow-clad, retreating summits of the higher Pyrenees have long since been blotted away in the night; so that now this gleaming cross shines out among the stars, among which it might well be some new and glorious constellation. To many, indeed, among the more ignorant of the

processionists it must in itself savour strongly of the miraculous; and in any case, swung there in the southern sky, it lends a note, a little bizarre perhaps, and yet, in its way, extraordinarily impressive, to the general vision of Lourdes by night.

Presently the long procession has formed itself, and now begins to move from the grotto out towards the big statue of the Virgin at the opposite end of the square (itself lit up with coloured fairy lamps) and thence, a river of light in the soft June darkness, through the rocky defile, where are represented the seven stations of the Cross. And as it passes onwards the hymn once more swells up to us in a hundred keys and voices, altos and baritones and trebles, "Ave, Ave, Ave Maria," robbed, by the very depths of its sincerity, of any semblance of discord. For fully an hour we watched it—the solemn passing of these earnest, candle-lit faces; and then, moving down the broad terrace above the square, we met again the leaders of the procession as they drew up below the steps. Presently they had all gathered there, thousands strong; whereupon, led by a priest from the open door of the church, they recited in one voice the great credo of their faith. Catholic or not, materialist, or veriest

atheist, it would have been impossible, I think, to listen unmoved to the deep-chested volume of sound that now rose up before us—superstitious if you will, but with a superstition that had laid its fibres into humanity's deepest being. And perhaps, after all, it was this strong, vibrating declaration of belief, purged, if not completely, yet to a very great extent, of such hysterical elements as had been obvious in the afternoon, that swept us up to the topmost pinnacle of the day's experiences. In the eyes of my young priest, at any rate, I could read that this was so. For him, as I could see, this was at once the bugle-note of the undefeatable hosts of God, and the herald of the great kingdom that was to come. It was the day's last word to him; and it rang gloriously with victory.

But for us there was another. For returning presently in a darkness that seemed doubly deep after the sudden extinguishing of all these lamps and candles, we came by accident upon a lover and his sweetheart. His arm was about her waist, and as we passed he was kissing her under the shadow of a doorway—a common enough spectacle, yet one that came upon us now with a shock that was almost startling. It served, at any rate, to demonstrate how far, in twenty-four

hours, we had drifted from the normal—and to remind me, with an odd and almost unbelievable emphasis, that in less than three days' time I shall be walking through Kensington Gardens.

Yr. affect. brother,

PETER.

XVIII

To Robert Lynn, M.R.C.S., Applebrook, Devon,

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
June 25, 1910.

MY DEAR BOB,

I have had a talk with Arthur, as you suggested, about his new appointment, and I think, on the whole, that he would be well advised to take it. As he said to me, poor boy, he has had just lately to readjust his future a bit, and the practice that he had thought of buying has ceased to have much attraction for him. And I needn't tell you again how very sorry I am that Molly, and perhaps to a lesser degree both Esther and myself, have been responsible for this. For you know quite well that there is nobody whom we would more gladly have welcomed as an extra son; and until quite lately we both fully believed—although we had never of course actually ascertained this—that Molly returned his feelings. Alas, however, for the best-laid plans—for since we discussed the matter at Applebrook, I have become almost certain that although her answer would be "yes" on every

other ground but this, on this particular one she will never, I'm afraid, be able to meet him with open arms. The event may contradict me, but I think not. The divine spark has not yet touched her heart. And I know you are with me in believing that she would be wrong, with all her youth in front of her, not to wait for it a little longer. And so Arthur, being robbed (but only for a time, I hope) of what he tells me sorrowfully was his *raison d'être*, has decided to postpone his début as a general practitioner —yet not without, unless I am very greatly mistaken, a certain secret atom of relief. For his real inclinations, I am sure, still centre in the laboratory and the microscope; and it was chiefly for financial reasons that he had abandoned any ideas of further dallying with them. He wanted to "do Molly," as he confided to me, "as well as he could"; and that would have been impossible, he was afraid, as a bacteriologist or pathologist. And there, from a strictly monetary standpoint, he was perhaps in the right. For though, as a profession (and through us, the great public), we must needs lean each year more heavily upon these skilled workers at our right hand, yet at present we are all very reluctant to give them their full dues either in professional *éclat*

or pounds, shillings, and pence. All the same, their day is coming, if perhaps a little slowly; so that maybe, after all, Miss Molly's unintentional cruelty may prove to be an angel in mufti. And now that he is in no immediate need of earning more money than can comfortably support himself, I think that this new appointment, as assistant in the inoculation department, is just the job for him. It will mean of course two years of life; but he has already been a house-surgeon and a house-physician, and in any case a two years' training in the exactest of all scientific technique will not be a waste of time whatever his ultimate occupation is destined to be.

Moreover (though it is seldom wise to prophesy) I am becoming pretty thoroughly convinced that the future of medicine lies more wholly in the hands of the vaccino-therapists than any of us are as yet quite able to realise. For when one comes to think of it, although surgery, during the last fifty years, has been advancing by leaps and bounds, medicine has been standing very still indeed. Where it has moved at all it has been chiefly on the lines of improving its methods of diagnosis, while as regards treatment it has remained very nearly as empirical as it was a

century ago. Perhaps this is rather a hard saying, but in the main I am quite sure that it is a true one. And I think its restoration to lively and effective growth will be more dependent upon the methods, so sound in their conception and so brilliant in their performance, of Sir Almroth Wright and his fellow-workers, at home and abroad, than upon any other factor now making for medical progress. As a school they are no doubt destined to confront a good many reverses. And they will presently be forced, I suspect, to re-state a certain number of their present beliefs. But their guiding principle is so essentially sane, so really scientific, in the true sense of an abused adjective, that I cannot think your boy will go far wrong in perfecting himself in their methods, and even perhaps deciding later to specialise altogether in this particular branch of medicine.

To determine by culture the precise organism that is causing a patient's malady (and how few are the diseases left to us that may be definitely classed as non-microbic) ; to learn by an examination of his blood-cells the exact condition of his resisting powers ; and to increase these by carefully graduated doses of his own or similar bacteria until his newly stimulated anti-bodies have been so increased and fortified as to be able

to win their own battle—it is a general method of treatment that seems to me to hold more palpably the key to future victory than any other. There's an infinity yet to be learned about it, of course. The mysteries of the anti-body have been scarcely fringed. And the technique is still so difficult that none but a highly trained man can be trusted with it. But if anybody is to win an ultimate triumph over incidental disease it is that trained man who is going to do it. And the sooner we consulting physicians learn rather to count him as a brother than a mere laboratory assistant, the better will it be for the march of light and healing. Amen. This little peroration was put into my head by a passage in an address that I heard delivered the other day at an evening lecture to post-graduates.

"Gentlemen," said the lecturer—a well-known provincial consultant, "I should like the day to dawn when I could be met at the door of my hospital by a trained chemist, a trained bacteriologist, a trained pathologist, so that when I came to some complicated case I could say, 'Chemist, a part of this problem is yours, take it and work it out. Bacteriologist, perform your share in elucidating this difficulty. Pathologist, advance, and do likewise.'"

There was a little applause; and after all, he had got, I suppose, some glimmering of what the new medicine is to be. Only he, the lecturer, was still, do you see, to be the *deus ex machina*. He was a genial old gentleman and quite without conceit, and was merely taking, as we all do, I'm afraid, the predominant position of the consulting physician as fixed for eternity. Whereas instead it is quite healthily rocking, I fancy, on waters that are ceasing to be stagnant.

Yours ever,

P. H.

XIX

To Hugh Pontrex, Hotel Montana, Biarritz.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
July 16, 1910.

MY DEAR HUGH,

So the pendulum of our frailty swings. The warm airs of July have surrounded you with well-being in your Atlantic quarters, and a confounded carbuncle under my left shoulder has been painting my world quite black for at least four days, and grey for the inside of a week. It's the penalty, I suppose, of being rarely laid aside by sickness, that when some trivial misfortune does make its appearance, one exaggerates its proportion in the general scheme of things to a quite unmerited degree—and especially, I think, if one happens to be a doctor. "Physician, heal thyself," the mockers say. But he should never attempt to. He knows too much about the various possibilities, the remoter significances of each one of his little troubles, to be a sufficiently clear-minded judge. And he is far better advised when he resigns his body *in toto* to the care of

some outside mind, and confines his own mental powers to the fortification of his private philosophy.

Pain, sleeplessness, and that peculiar sense of being disowned by one's own body that a high temperature always seems to induce—I suppose if all the comfortable words that have been uttered in their explanation were to be gathered up into a book the whole world would not be great enough to contain it. We were told not so desperately long ago that they represented the direct tenancy of the evil one or some of his dependents. Then a more enlightened but still stern theology informed us that they represented the well-deserved judgments of God; until a later and more generous interpretation has inclined rather to believe in them as evidences, a little puzzlingly disguised, of a chastening yet still indubitable Love.

But, alas, it is so easy, even in the full comfort of bodily health, to perceive the bottomless gaps in these and all other arguments about the great problem of pain, that in the actual enduring of it there seems, after all, very little to be done but to lie low, and bear it humbly—as many a better fellow and weaker woman have borne worse things before us since the foreconsciousness

of death became the price of the first man's soul. And yet I believe quite orthodoxly that these unattractive episodes in one's life—even carbuncles—do really contain some sort of a message to one's intelligence, apart from the patent one that somewhere or other one has blundered against a natural law, and paid the necessary penalty.

For there comes a period in most illnesses, I think, sometimes during a temporary respite, more often perhaps at the first dawn of convalescence, when one becomes extraordinarily conscious, yet without discomfort, of the almost trivial delicacy of one's surrounding tissue. It is generally, I suppose, a moment of exhaustion, both mental and physical, either upon the bugle of a victory or a truce. But it is a moment when one's spiritual æsthesis, as it were, is peculiarly at liberty. Very soon, in a minute or two even, Nature will begin her work of restoration—none more willing than she, given a very little patience and half a straw to make her bricks with. But now she is standing by for a moment, trowel in hand, and the outer wind is breathing through the gap. And it's then, I think, if you'll only listen carefully enough, that you can sometimes hear it whispering.

"Presently," you can hear it say, "this little house of yours will be mended, and the more easily maybe, because its walls are so thin. But don't—don't forget too quickly that it is but a house after all."

Yet I suppose we do forget it, most of us, and probably quite healthily, when once the dwelling-place is bricked up again, and the new paint is on, and it stands foursquare to the winds that may not enter now. And yet again, if the message has once been heard, or twice, or thrice, as circumstances have it, I don't believe that it is ever entirely lost. And there, perhaps, may even lie the key to all the mystery; so that when the last storm blows, and Nature must shake her head, and let the frail house fall, its tenant may not go out altogether unprepared.

I felt all this very strongly some ten days ago, having made or reviewed my will about twenty-seven times, resigned myself to the administration of gas and the skilful weapons of old Sir Jeremy across the way, and awakened next morning to a normal temperature and a comparatively comfortable back. But a week's high feeding, and three days with Esther at Eastbourne, in the occasional brisk and simple company of Claire and her pals, have been steadily blunting my

higher susceptibilities. So that's why I've been setting them on record with so much circumstantial detail—a great deal less for your satisfaction than my own.

We had resolved to take Miss Claire by surprise, and, calling at the school, found, as a consequence, that she was out. She had probably gone Pevensey way, thought the maid, with some of the older young ladies and one of the governesses. And it was out Pevensey way that we presently recognised upon the beach, among a heterogeneous collection of empty shoes and stockings, some big-brimmed straw hats with the school ribbon upon them. Their owners were for the most part thigh-deep in the English Channel with their skirts tucked conveniently round their plump waists. And they were being watched from the shore by a very pleasant young lady, who looked rather wistfully as if she would like to be out there too. Yes, she told us, Claire was in the water with the others, probably among the deeper ones who were getting their knickers wet. Surveying the melée with an expression of polite concern, she was rather afraid that it would be a little difficult to make Claire understand who we were. But if we wouldn't mind waiting for a minute or two they would all

be coming in to dry their legs before going back to prep.

Presently some floating atom of wreckage took them unanimously eastward, splashing through the shallows, until the governess, waving a white handkerchief, brought them gingerly ashore across a little bank of rather slippery-looking rock. There was a general shaking out and re-arranging of tousled manes, yellow and chestnut and black, and a modest dropping of skirts to the demurer level of shining wet knees.

The little party drifted slowly towards us, their brown feet lingering wholesomely across the sands.

"You'll know Claire," said the governess, "by the bandage round her instep. I oughtn't really to have let her paddle."

Esther's eyes became a little anxious.

"But what has been the matter?" she asked.

The governess smiled.

"Oh, nothing very serious," she said. "And I think you must ask Claire herself. Tales out of school, you know."

And then the least tidy, perhaps, of the damsels detached herself suddenly from her comrades, and came down upon us at top speed, regardless of pebbles.

"Have you got me off prep?" she asked earnestly, after she had kissed us and found her shoes and stockings. And having explained to her that we were going to take her out to tea for a pre-birthday treat—she was going to be sixteen next week—we inquired about the bandage. It was the result, we discovered, of an illegal (and unconfirmed) raid upon a neighbouring dormitory, during which, by a kind of Homeric retribution, a stray tin-tack had wounded her unprotected foot.

"But it's about well now, I should think," she said, undoing the bandage, and turning up a salmon-pink sole for our inspection. And we were obliged to confess that it was.

She rolled up the bandage into a little ball, and threw it down the beach.

"I wish we could *always* go barefoot," she sighed. And for the moment I felt inclined to agree with her. For the happy foot, as T. E. Brown has said, swings rather from the heart than from the hip. And there are few prettier things in nature than the restless, romping legs of the average healthy little maiden. They are her life's joy made visible; so that it really seems a shame, if a necessary one, to imprison

them in even the airiest of stockings and the most hygienic of leather shoes.

Blue gingham petticoats,
White blown aprons,
Five pairs of plump legs
Twinkling down the hill,
Black imprisoned plump legs,
Fretful for the stream bed,
Tired of shoes and stockings,
Dancing like a rill,
Dancing down the hill-side,
So come the children,
Like a rill in sunshine,
So dance they,
Seek the solemn waters,
Marching to the ocean,
Set the solemn waters
Laughing at their play.
So into my heart come,
Silver it with laughter,
Lest among the shadows
Lost should be its way,
So into my heart come
Rosamund and Daphne,
Marian and Rosemary,
And little baby May.

Claire and her companions had been paddling in the big ocean itself; and being comparatively dignified did not of course wear aprons. Moreover, as I had the strongest reasons for believing, they were at this moment quite innocent of

petticoats. But the little poem comes back to me as I write.

"And next week," she proceeded ruefully, "I shall have to go into blobs and half-masters."

We stared at her rather blankly.

"All the girls do, you know," she added, "when they turn sixteen."

"But blobs——" I began.

"And half-masters?" puzzled Esther.

"When your hair's neither up nor down," Claire explained, "with a big fat bow on it. And when you have to wear skirts a foot below your knees."

She rolled over, and struck her toes into the sand.

"It's to show," she finished pathetically, "that you're too grown up to be spanked and not old enough to have visiting cards."

Which seems to suggest that even sixteen may have its tragedies, though its capacity for ices remains happily unimpaired. Or would you call them growing pains? And are all pains growing pains?

Ever yrs.,

P. H.

XX

To Horace Harding, c/o Major Alec Cameron, Glen Bruisk, Sutherland, N.B.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
August 17, 1910.

MY DEAR HORACE,

So you have yielded at last. Your fine contempt for the gentlest art has begun to dissolve. And being on the very brink of one of the snuggest of sea-trout lochs you think that you must really have a cast or two upon its waters. There are people who will tell you, of course, that it's a blind man's game, or very nearly so, this loch trout fishing. But let the blue waters —crinkled, if fortune smiles, with the daintiest of ripples—be their immediate and sufficient refutation. And some day they may behold you casting one of Mrs. Richardson's artfullest duns over those senior wranglers among trout that lurk in the disillusioned depths of the Itchen.

At the same time I am not forwarding you an outfit for your birthday present, as you so delicately suggest, firstly because you tell me

that Major Cameron can easily fix you up with all that is necessary; but principally because I am not quite comfortable in my mind as to your real motive for caressing the surface of Loch Bruisk. I should like to be just a little surer that it is a genuine regard for *salmo trutta* rather than a merely altruistic (though very praiseworthy) desire to be properly companionable to Miss Graham, who is, as you tell me, so awfully keen about it.

It is of course a very strong point in her favour, and I remember her brother quite well. He plays half for Richmond, I think, and you introduced us to one another at Queen's. And his sister—I don't remember that you have mentioned her to me before—may of course be the means to an end—an instrument chosen by a merciful Providence whereby a new channel of enjoyment is about to be revealed to you. But on the other hand, I can't help feeling that with your duty done, cheerfully and bravely, as I have no doubt will be the case—and Miss Graham away—the yearning to catch trout may conceivably leave you. So I am sending you instead my very best wishes for the happiest of birthdays, and a hope that you have many others yet in store for you.

I am glad that you have determined to go up for your second medical some time next year, and note that you have taken away volumes of anatomy and physiology in your trunk. If you will accept my paternal advice, however, you will leave them there until you have decided that your health is sufficiently recuperated to return either to Cambridge or Harley Street. I don't want you to curtail your holidays. I have far too much respect both for holidays in general and yourself in particular. For it's one of the most pathetic features about the genuine old codger (and one of his surest signs too) that his periods of recreation tend to become progressively shorter—and not always by force of circumstances. They may actually begin to bore him. He may even have to make an effort of will to prolong them for his ultimate good—to school himself into regarding them as cures. Thus, while at twenty-two a summer vacation of less than two months is too monstrous to be seriously considered, at forty-two one becomes grateful for a fortnight, could do with three weeks, but is apt to find a month just a trifle too long. Whereas at fifty-two—— So don't curtail them. And yet better is it to curtail them than to pollute. And unless you particularly need them for pre-

serving specimens of the local flora or maintaining the creases upon your Sunday trousers, you should never, never, never pack technical books in a holiday trunk. It is to put poison—or at any rate water—into the wine that you are to pour out before the gods of mountain and moor and loch. And though they are generous they are proud. And they will surely make you repent it—not merely because it is tactless, as though you should make Miss Dolly—I think that was her name ?—the staple article of your conversations with Miss Graham ; and not merely because it shows your ignorance, as though you should munch gingernuts with that fine old port which your uncle has dug up for your especial benefit ; but because—far worse—it is an evidence of double-dealing. And no god, not even the presiding deity of the tiniest mountain ash, is going to stand that. If you read your Bible, as I hope you do, you will have been warned concerning this simultaneous worship of two contrary masters, and the doom that must certainly befall it. And that's why no really wise schoolmaster ever sets his pupils a holiday task, though there are still, I'm afraid, a few foolish ones left. I hardly like to think that mine can have been among them ; and yet there's no doubt that "Marmion," the "Lady of the

Lake," the "Cloister and the Hearth," and several other peaks upon the literary landscape remain clouded to me for ever.

You would have thought this a sufficiently clear lesson, perhaps, upon the point that I am pressing into you. But it wasn't. And I remember consecrating a golden September in Fife to the mastery of my materia medica. There's a moor, for instance, somewhere between Dunfermline and Rumbling Bridge that will eternally be associated in my mind with the preparations of opium. I can recall in all its hideous detail some such afternoon's tramp as this :—

"By George, that's a fine piece of colouring, the sunlight on that dying heather over there, Tinct : Camph : Co : strength of opium one in two hundred and forty. There are the Ochils again, pil : plumbi cum opio, strength of opium one in eight——Damn, I forgot to look for that big trout when I crossed the burn just now. Extractum opii, strength of opium two in one" (it sounds improbable—even theological—but if you look it up you will discover it to be correct, and I have never found the knowledge in the least important). And, as a result, that particular moor will always whisper to me unhealthily of morphia, while the preparations of opium had

to be learned all over again in something less than six weeks' time.

And you will generally find it to be the case, I think, that the work which has desecrated the holiday can seldom stand either the test of an examination or the more valuable one of practical appliance. For it's the term's work, the good, solid, everyday's grind in the dissecting-room or the physiological theatre, and later in the wards and the out-patient department, that is the bone and marrow of your pre-graduate education. Without it no amount of feverish cramming will ever make you efficient, though it may occasionally perhaps save you from being deservedly ploughed. And with it no cramming should be necessary—or at most a very little. For there are still a few subjects, alas, demanded by examining boards that can be learned, I suppose, in no other way—such as the preparations of opium before mentioned, with their respective strengths and all that appertains unto them, and the ingredients of various obscure powders that you will never hear about again. In after life you will always refer to your pharmacopeia if you want information upon these subjects, and no normal mind has either the capacity or the desire to retain their details for

so long as twenty-four hours after they have been required in the examination-room.

But as a general rule, and one that is happily gaining ground every year, you will find that your examiners will far prefer to discover in you the evidences of a functionally active, if somewhat lightly stored, mind than a kind of *paté de foie gras*, fattened up for the occasion, but too inert, as a result, to leave him quite happy about its future. And that's why it's always a good thing to take life easily during the last week before your papers have to be written. Go abroad, mix with normal men and women, to whom examinations are just episodes in the lives of other people, fearsome but remote. And remind yourself in their unruffled company that, after all, they *are* merely episodes. You won't forget anything really important in that time. If you do, you can never properly have known it. While as for the trimmings, you will be more than compensated for the shedding of a few of these by the sanity and freshness with which your brain will come to its ordeal—as an example of the reverse of which there occurs to me the vision of a pallid young man who addressed me about six weeks ago in the hospital lobby. He was very much fright-

ened. I didn't know who he was. Indeed I don't think that I had ever seen him before. And the remnants of a natural modesty were evidently struggling to hold him back. But Circumstance, and the awful fact that in less than an hour's time he was due for a *viva* upon the Thames Embankment, forced him trembling towards me. He wiped his forehead—I was the only likely subject within range at the moment, and his train was to leave in exactly seven and a half minutes.

"I can remember the hooklets," he gasped, "but *would* you mind telling me, sir, which of the tapeworms it is that has four suckers?"

Poor boy—I could see that his whole future was pivoting miserably upon those forgotten suckers; and, by an excessively fortunate accident, I happened to have some notes for a lecture upon the subject in one of my pockets.

"If you'll wait a moment," I told him honestly, "I think that I can let you know. But I really couldn't tell you offhand."

He looked at me anxiously, and I could see my reputation tottering in his eyes as I searched about for my pocket-book.

"Nor could your examiners, you know," I assured him, "unless they had just primed them-

selves beforehand, or carried notes upon their cuffs—which they probably do."

His brow cleared amazingly at this, and I could see that the relative importance of knowing, without reference, the precise number of a tapeworm's suckers was beginning to define itself a little more clearly to his distressed understanding. So I read out my notes to him, and he dashed upon his way, relieved if not rejoicing. But you mustn't ever become like that, you know, although it's not so difficult to do so as you may think.

And lastly, if there should be a Miss Graham—I speak in the abstract, of course, and very, very tentatively—she must be allowed to share none of the homage that every respectable examination insists upon monopolising. She may still be the goddess in your car. For on the whole I think that goddesses (of the right sort) make for careful driving. But at present your eyes must be chiefly upon the reins. You must forgive me for touching upon a topic that you will probably find extremely irrelevant, but there are certain things in a Highland country house that are curiously apt to wander a little from their true perspective. I ought to have mentioned, by the way, that Churchills are sending you a gun, which I hope may arrive safely with this letter. For though I

am quite open to conviction about the fishing, I feel rather more certain about the shooting. It was pre-Grahamite, you see—you haven't told me her Christian name—pre-Dollyite, pre-Beryl-ite — and even, if I remember rightly, pre-Looite ; so that I think it may safely be accepted as being integral and not merely adventitious. Anyway, there's the gun, and I hope that you'll kill many grouse with it in spite of your sister Molly and her humanitarian comrades. For grouse, like men, must die on a day, and better the quick shot in mid-flight than to crawl away, and to perish slowly in the corner as most of us, alas, will probably have to do when our sunset days come round.

I expect you will already have had letters from mother and Molly, if not from Tom and Claire, who are staying with Lady Wroxton at Stoke, and defying the Thames Conservancy in the matter of mixed bathing during most of the forbidden hours. You heard, no doubt, or saw in the papers, that Rupert Morris has had a K added to his C.B. ; which means, I suppose, that his little scrap on the frontier was more important than he led us to suppose. In any case, nobody, I should think, has deserved his title more, and quite certainly no one will value it less. He is

expected home, I believe, about the end of September, and you will probably meet him at Stoke, where Molly (having squared her conscience) is presently to assist in the extra housekeeping demanded by the partridges and pheasants. With much love,

Yr. affect. father,

P. H.

XXI

To Miss Josephine Summers, The Cottage, Potham, Beds.

91B Harley Street, W.,
August 25, 1910.

My dear Aunt Josephine,

I have, of course, frequently seen many of the pictures that you mention, and have also read some of the stories of which, as you say, each illustration professes to tell one. I don't think however that I have seen the particular one of the signalman which you enclose; and it certainly seems a coincidence that he should be pressing his left hand so vehemently upon the precise spot at which your cook also is so apt to suffer pain. And it is odd too that, like her, he would appear to be so thoroughly respectable that their common affliction becomes a little difficult to understand. It is not, as you say, as if either of them gave one the least impression of being in any degree *loose* or *rackety*. At the same time, from a close examination of the signalman's anatomy, I don't think that the

organs so frequently mentioned in his very eloquent account of himself are those most likely to be affected. And perhaps your cook may also be happily under a similar misapprehension. And that is why, before taking the pills that have been so markedly blessed to the signalman, I would suggest the outward application of a little friction with the open palm of someone else's hand in which have been previously placed a few drops of turpentine. It will be so far less expensive, you see; and, even if not finally successful, will at any rate do no harm. But I have great hopes.

Your affect. nephew,

PETER HARDING.

XXII

To Reginald Pole, S.Y. Nautilus, Harwich.

91B Harley Street, W.,
August 30, 1910.

My dear Reggie,

When one of your youngest journalists from Franciscan House called upon me last night, I guessed at once that you were either away from home or that you had given the lad *carte blanche* to collect material for a "silly season" discussion, without adding an Olympian hint or two as to where he had best go hunting. As a matter of fact both surmises turned out to be correct; and I even seemed to detect in him a certain air of relief as he admitted the first, while he was still young enough to feel rather important with regard to the second. Unhappy youth—how should he know that he had run into the very jaws of your arch-enemy?

It was a college friendship with Horace, he informed me, that was his excuse for calling upon me, although of course he knew quite well that I was an eminent authority on the subject

in hand. This was so obvious an afterthought that I couldn't help asking him what the subject might be. He told his lie so nicely, you see, and was so humbly aware of its small worth. He coloured a little.

"Are we nervous?" he said.

I pushed over the tobacco-jar, and asked him to fill his pipe.

"I hope not," I replied, and he coloured a little more.

"You don't understand," he explained. "That is to be the headline of the discussion. At least, that was what I'd thought myself. But some of the other fellows have suggested, 'Are we *more* nervous?' or 'Where are our National Nerves?' or 'National Neurosis; are we suffering from it?'"

I nodded.

"Yours is the shortest," I said.

"Just so," he replied, "and, I think, the most arresting."

"And who's going to write the first letter?" I asked.

"Well," he stammered, "I rather expect it will be me."

"And you'll call yourself 'A London Physician,' I suppose?"

"Something like that," he confessed. "You see, a newspaper discussion like this is all right when once it's started—that is, if it's a live one, as Mr. Pole calls it. The other letters simply pour in."

"From Balham and Holloway and Tottenham and Ilford——"

"Oh yes," he smiled, "and from Kensington and Mayfair as well."

"You think that a good many of your readers will like to tell the public all about their nerves?"

"Thousands of 'em," he said confidently.

"And you'll select a certain number of letters from each district, and fill up a couple of your daily columns for nothing?"

"That's the idea. And we shall give a lot of pleasure too."

"And the writers and the writers' friends will rush to buy copies, I suppose, and cut out their letters, and stick them in albums."

He laughed.

"I shouldn't wonder," he said. "Making personal friends for the paper—that's what Mr. Pole calls it. He says that nothing pays better."

"And presently, perhaps, you'll collect all the letters, and put them in a little booklet of which

you'll sell large numbers for sixpence in a comfortable dressing-gown of advertisements."

"Possibly," he said, "if it goes really well."

I looked at him for a moment, upon the threshold of his life-work. He was a nice boy, though the shades of Franciscan House were fast closing about him.

"D'you think it's worth it?" I asked him.

"Why rather," he said. "Pays like anything."

"Forty per cent, perhaps?"

"Very likely."

"The Franciscan heaven," I admitted, and he winced a little. By which I knew, of course, that he was as yet no true Franciscan—who never winces, and whose conscience, to use a borrowed phrase, is merely his accomplice.

"Do you object to forty per cent?" he asked.

"*Per se?*" I answered, "not at all."

"But to the correspondence perhaps?"

"I'm not enamoured of the idea," I confessed. "Are you?"

He reached for the ash-tray, and knocked out his pipe.

"We must give 'em what they want, you know," he said.

I bowed.

"The Franciscan creed," I told him. "But perhaps they don't know yet that they do want it."

"Then we must show 'em," he replied.

"The Franciscan gospel," I sighed, for, as I have said, he was a nice boy, still trailing a wisp or two of glory.

"And besides," he went on, "people always like to talk about their weak nerves, don't they?"

He was getting in under my guard now to bleed me of copy, so I stepped aside.

"Play cricket?" I asked him.

"A bit," he confessed.

"Ever stopped a rot?"

"Sometimes," he replied warily.

"How did you do it?" I inquired.

He laughed again.

"Now you're getting at me, aren't you?" he said.

"Of course I am. Haven't you been trying to get at me?"

"Do you think you're going to score?" he asked.

"I shouldn't wonder," I told him; "because you didn't encourage those panicky fellow-

batsmen of yours to talk about their nerves, did you? On the contrary, you swaggered a bit yourself, and told 'em that the bowling was poor stuff. You didn't even tell 'em to forget that growing excavation behind their belt-buckles. You were subtler. You took it for granted that they hadn't got one. You surrounded 'em with the proper atmosphere. You were more than half a nerve specialist already—the better half. You infected them with your own health. But what are you proposing to do now?"

The journalist in him died hard.

"Then you think there *is* a rot?" he asked.

"I didn't say so."

He put his pipe in his pocket, and picked up his hat and gloves.

"After all," he smiled, "you've only been preaching the old doctrine of responsibility, you know. And the modern journalist is a detached person." But I shook my head.

I repeat that he was a nice boy, and had borne my little pi-jaw with admirable fortitude.

"Only semi-detached," I ventured, "with a half-educated brother next door."

I fancy that I can see you lying snugly aft upon the "Nautilus" at anchor—a bronzing cynic, smiling gently over this ingenuous little duel. And

perhaps you have already made up your mind to transfer this incomplete disciple of yours to some other department, or even (according to a fundamental Franciscan tradition) to dispense with his services altogether. For if he cannot bring himself to demolish one prehistoric physician, what *can* he do? And I shall be sorry if he is put to any real inconvenience. But on the other hand I shall rejoice openly to see him save his soul alive. For though I didn't tell him so, and though I am convinced that at the core—the germ-plasm, if you like—the race is still happily sound enough, yet if there is a rot, a temporary epidemic of nervous instability, it is largely confined to those who draw their mental nourishment from Franciscan House, and whose twitterings you are now proposing to exploit.

Autres temps, autres mœurs, for while there was a time when our more ignorant forefathers were wont to scoff (mistakenly, no doubt, but on balance with a tonic effect) at the possessors of "weak nerves," now that we have learned just enough to talk about them in bad Greek "neurasthenia" is an affection of which no man need be ashamed. "Poor chap," we say, and begin to wonder if we are not sufferers ourselves.

You will have observed that my reference is masculine, although the older historians have regarded the complaint as being chiefly confined to women. But you are not to deduct from this, as I can see you trying to do, that the neurasthenia of to-day is therefore a new variety, whose exhibition in your halfpenny daily paper is justifiable on public grounds. For if it attacked mainly a certain class of our great-grandmothers and their maternal ancestors, this was less, I think, on account of their sex than of their circumstances—the predisposing combination in some of them of slender academic endowment with unexercised mental activity.

Times have changed, but even then it was not the woman of affairs, whose education, ample or the reverse, had been salted by the winds of action—it was not the queens and the states-women at the one pole, or the workers in the fields at the other, but the secluded gentle-women between them, who fainted daily, and agonised over beetles and mice. *Requiescant in pace*, for their day is no more, and their busier daughters have no longer time to write pathetic little self-revelations in unventilated boudoirs, or collapse at a knock upon the door. Instead, they will vault nimbly over the window-sill;

while as for the beetles, they will kill them for you mercifully, and explain their pedigree in Latin.

But the class that they have thus vacated has not, alas, been suffered to die out, and is now perhaps even fuller than ever. Gone, it is true, with the conditions that produced them, are the vaporous women of Richardson and Fielding. But here in their stead, and in a very similar soil, is the twopenny clerk of to-day. And it is typically in his Harringay villa that one must search for the modern neurasthenic. A little cheap education, a long period of physical security, a comfortable, if inexpensive, assurance of at any rate the more primal necessities, and the demand of ever coalescing industries for an innumerable army of semi-automatic dependents —all these have been at work. And they have built up for us a hundred airless mental chambers, whose inhabitants, desperately aware of their gentility, and sufficiently educated for a little self-probing, have nothing more demanded from them than to copy out stereotyped letters or manipulate a Morse key. To obtain their chance of doing these things they had to acquire a small amount of knowledge—since seldom added to; and to do them automatically a few months

of mental apprenticeship became necessary. No more was asked of them. And after a little while, and in the great majority of cases, they have ceased to ask more of themselves. And I have seen men crying in my consulting-room over some trivial, unexpected appeal that has been too much for their paralysed initiative.

You may think that my analogy is far-fetched, and superficially I'll admit that it is. But probe a little deeper, and you'll find how exactly the related conditions have produced corresponding types. Look at my sequestered lady busy with her eternal crochet, but in reality not busy at all. And then behold my little clerk occupied with his letters and his envelope-licking, but with a brain as really unemployed as my lady's. Read out to me the writings of my sequestered lady or the records of her conversations. How little she had read or seen or studied, and yet with what confident persistence she uttered her superlatives. And now talk to my little clerk, who likewise has climbed no mountains of comparison, and his tiniest headache is "shocking," his least calamity "terrible." Why, only this afternoon I was asked for a tonic by such an one (your halfpenny illustrated was peeping out of his pocket) on the ground that yesterday he had

seen a small child cut its forehead, and held it till the doctor came. Listen to my sequestered lady, innocence herself, and her talk, with titters, is of my lord's *liaisons*, my lady's cure, and what the neighbours think. And listen to my little clerk, and what are his topics but these ?

God forbid that I should hold either of them up for ridicule (it's you that I'm ultimately to annihilate), for such generalities as these are never more than half true. My lady was only waiting for the marching years to become a Florence Nightingale and a Madame Curie. She was only waiting to be shown, and admitted into, the great worlds outside her boudoir to prove a right of way that has long since ceased to be questioned. And who shall say what shining destiny awaits my little clerk ? For it is not, as we are so often told, the mere rush of our modern industrialism that is at the root of so much neurasthenia—it is its blank automatism, with its endless opportunities for self-pity. And one can only suppose that as we advance in knowledge much of this human drudgery will be delegated to other instruments. But the time is not yet, alas, and meanwhile all that is best of him has to struggle with circumstances only too sorrowfully adapted to morbid mental imaginings.

"The result of all this free education," you will be told by a certain type of elderly *raisonneur*. But of course he is wrong. It's not less education that we want, but more. For even in the good old days, as I have said, it was not the Marie Stuarts and the Queen Elizabeths, delivering their Latin orations and translating their "Mirrors of the Sinful Soul" at thirteen and fourteen years old, it was not the full-tide women of the Renaissance, who were afterwards conspicuous for nervous debility. And nor is it the really well-educated clerk of to-day. For while a little education is chiefly dangerous in so far as it increases a man's self-consciousness without showing him where it is gently to be laughed at, a little more will generally remedy this defect, to the lasting benefit of his sanity. No, it's in his awful self-seriousness that lurks the subtlest enemy of the half-educated man. If you can make a man laugh at himself, you can make him laugh at his nerves—which is better than a hecatomb of bromides.

Well then, there's my analogy; and here's where it breaks down. My lady's prison walls were concrete as well as abstract; my clerk's are chiefly abstract. She was in the world but not of it. He is both in it and of it. She could

scarcely touch upon its treasures if she would. For him they are waiting—the real ones—if he will only take them. Long ago we have recognised the merely physical dangers of his daily enforced imprisonment. And we have framed a hundred sanitary laws to provide him with his oxygen unsullied. But what about his half-developed mind? You will tell me that good lectures are abundant, and that classics may be bought for a shilling. Yet what are these, at the best, but occasional winds of thought, too often resented as a draught? And who is it but you, creeping under his door for a halfpenny, that creates his mental atmosphere? You may tell me that you only reproduce it, with its constituents very faithfully proportioned—a nebulous sermonette once a week, an inch to the scientific progress of both the hemispheres, and three columns to the personal appearance of the Camden murderer. And you may justify yourself on the same grounds for covering your nakedness, as you did last week (I'm glad that you yourself were away), with an appeal in big letters that he should buy your orange-coloured weekly, wherein—with delicious exclusiveness—he might find, in all its details, the life-history of this same criminal's flimsy little paramour, written (God

forgive you—and him) by her own father; and the nadir, one can only pray, of your efforts for forty per cent. But you cannot at the same time lay a finger on your paragraph of Health Hints, and boast complacently about the influence of the Press. Nor do you, I suppose, with any real conviction; and I may have exaggerated, perhaps, in crediting you with the creation of anybody's atmosphere. For the true brain-worker passes you by, and the manual labourer has his antidote at hand; while the little clerk is not, in a modern and abominable phrase, "a person who matters." But then he is. And in the battle for mental vigour that, under present conditions, he must consciously fight or die, you might so easily be playing the biggest rather than the least worthy part. For our help still cometh from the hills. And surely it's of the hill-top men, the men who are climbing, the men with a view, that you should be telling him, morning and evening, as he sits in his London cellule. Whereas instead, with his birthright ever broadening about him, you still drearily drag him after you to Bow Street, where you photograph him in his pitiful queue for to-morrow's illustration. Dear me, I'm afraid that I'm tub-thumping; and you'll think that I've

forgotten your farm and your balloon-house and your daily reports upon the cuckoo and the corn-crake. But I haven't; and what's more, I'm quite ready to believe that if Bow Street went out of fashion you'd be the first to appreciate the fact. We should soon be hearing indeed that you had led the movement. And that's why you don't really stem the onward march of sanity, though there are casualties *en route* of which it would be difficult to acquit you. While as for your National Neurosis, one foreign battery on Primrose Hill would bury it for two generations.

It might also blow the roof off Franciscan House.

. . . . . .

"But poor Reggie can't do anything by himself," says Esther.

"They all say that," I grumble.

"And haven't you been just a little bit rude?"

"I'm attacking a point of view," I explain, "and I feel rather heated."

She looks over my shoulder reproachfully.

"And you've never even *mentioned* our having the baby when they take the 'Nautilus' to Italy."

"No more I have."

"And it's the very thing I told you to write about."

And this is true. For we *must* have the baby.

Yr. sorrowful friend,

P. H.

P.S.—This letter almost makes me wonder why I like you.

XXIII

To Miss Sarah Harding, The Orphanage, Little Blessington, Dorset.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
September 6, 1910.

MY DEAR SALLY,

There was a young American, Stephen Crane, who wrote, a few years ago, a little volume called "Wounds in the Rain." You may have read it. It was rather a grim book, but written with a good deal of power, and a promise of more to come that the author, alas, never lived to fulfil. And not the worst part of it was its title, with its suggestion of grey suffering, the aftermath alike of victory and defeat. And yet I am not sure that "Wounds in the Sun" would not literally have stood for a far greater sum of misery. Only he would never have made us feel it.

For there's an implicit sadness in the monosyllable rain—in the very sound of it—that depends, I think, when you come to analyse it, less upon the ideas of water and wetness and possible chill

that it conjures up, than upon an underlying suggestion of something falling. It's a little hard to account for it—I would commend the subject to a metaphysician if I could be certain that it hasn't already been dealt with by him—and yet it's a fact, I think, that we have invested all falling things with a certain quality of tragedy, with at any rate no single idea of cheerfulness. Think of what you will, from little Susan's tear to Lucifer, son of the Morning, and of all the more material phenomena that lie between them —cascades, avalanches, autumn leaves—and you will find that while your vision perceives in them pity, or solemnity, or terror, or even disgust, it clothes no falling thing with actual joy. And the swifter the fall the more profound are these sentiments that it engenders.

Thus the sheer waterfall, spilling itself unbroken over some brooding crag into a pit of blackness, contains just so much more gloom than the torrent, leaping down from rock to rock, as its descent is more vertical and headlong. The thistledown, sliding earthwards upon the wind, is less tragic than the rain-sodden beech-leaf by just the measure of its longer passage through the air. While the rain that drives horizontally against one's Burberry may be a good

deal more penetrating, but is seldom so dismal as that which drops down undisturbed from the drab sky to earth.

I believe that there is a sermon in all this somewhere—in the universal instinct with which we find sorrow, or at least some factor of it, in all that falls; and joy, or at any rate its suggestion, in most things that rise up, and open, and turn themselves towards the heavens. But I'll spare you the preaching of it, since these reflections merely spring to my mind as the result, last Saturday, of a particularly wet tramp from Beer to Sidmouth.

I had been called down in consultation on Friday, and having spent the night in the sick man's house, decided next morning to walk the eight miles along the coast. It was one of those baffling Devonshire mornings of rain and mist with rhythmical promises, never fulfilled, of a watery sunshine to come; and both my hostess and the local doctor were fain to press motor-cars upon me. But I had made up my mind, and assured them that I was one of those many people—possibly foolish—who rather enjoyed a walk in the rain.

My host, who was by way of being a philosopher as well as an invalid, looked at me with a twinkle.

"So you really think you like it?" he asked me.

"Yes," I told him. "I really do like it."

He put a hand on my shoulder.

"No, you don't," he said. "Just think it over between here and Sidmouth."

And he was right. Before I had walked two miles I knew that he was right. I don't enjoy walking in the rain, though I often do it, and always claim to like it. I merely walk in it for the rather subtle enjoyment of getting out of it, and for the sake of plumbing a little more deeply, at my journey's end, the everyday delights of dryness, warmth, and a deep-bosomed chair. I become a Tibetan at the prayer-wheel storing up joys to come in a whetted appetite for to-morrow's blue sky. For though I must admit that there's a certain decorative effect about rain over a countryside, yet it's an effect of pure melancholy, scientifically unfounded of course—at any rate until science can explain the proposition at the beginning of this letter—heightening loneliness, exaggerating the hardship of toil, deepening the horror of death, but adding quite an extraordinary power to any gleam of even the tearfullest of sunshine that may have stumbled into some corner of the landscape. And there's always the possibility of that gleam being the herald of a sudden conquest of

glory, in whose triumph your merely fair-weather pedestrian can never have a part.

Thus a memory comes back to me, for instance, of a dreary five-in-the-morning start, a hopeless breakfast, a dogged rain-soaked tramp up the steep hillside—and then the summit of Ben Lomond, a very ark above the flood, borne up, as it were, into the midmost sanctuary of heaven, with the submerging seas rolling out to the world's end, and the wind thrilling over them like an organ. Ten minutes ago, and the sun had lost itself for ever. And now it flamed there like the white throne of God, till the horizons melted before its gaze, and the great dead began majestically to rise—Ben More, Ben Lawers, the Cairngorms, and the distant peaks of Arran.

My sunshine on Saturday last however was not, I should think, more than twelve years old. She was standing rather pensively (but without agitation) near a cottage gate ; and fortunately I had provided myself with some bulls'-eyes at a village called Branscombe, where a kindly old lady had assured me that there was still a great demand for them. I extracted one from the bag, and was thanked politely but by no means deferentially. There was a moment's pause during which a damp physician was being gravely relegated to

his proper sphere in the natural scheme of things —an obviously humble one. Then she threw me a fact.

"Nellie arn't got one," she observed.

So I gave her one for Nellie.

"Anybody else?" I inquired.

She looked down for a minute at the plump and striped confection.

"Mother likes *them* things," she said—and I had seen by this time, of course, that her mother must be a very nice mother. So she accepted one for mother.

"And is that all?" I asked.

"Well," she said doubtfully, "*Baby's* just arf to sleep."

And this is all that I shall ever remember about the road from Beer to Sidmouth.

I am finding it harder than ever this year to get a summer holiday. And while these little glimpses of the country merely sharpen my desire for more, I find myself telling myself sternly that I must really learn to be contented with them. And at any rate I have been enabled to see more of the hospital than for some time past; and, as you know, this is to be my last year there as a visiting physician.

This afternoon, my junior being salmon-fishing

in Norway, I thought that I would take the out-patients for the first time in twelve years; and the clinical assistant proving not unwilling to go and play tennis, I amused myself with seeing the lot of them. For there's no other commentary upon men and manners quite like a collection of out-patients at a large hospital. Listen therefore to a stalwart gentleman who earns twenty shillings a week, and doesn't stint himself in beer.

"Debility, doctor," he said, "that's what's the metter with me." He dropped his voice huskily. "Domestic trouble," he added.

"Dear me," I sympathised, feeling his pulse. "Serious?"

"Twins," he said gloomily; "second lot I've 'ed in eighteen months; an' I think it's run me down."

Your aff. brother,

PETER.

XXIV

To the Rev. Bruce Harding, S. Peter's College, Morecambe Bay.

c/o Harry Carthew, Crome Lodge,
near Caversham, Berks,
September 14, 1910.

My dear Bruce,

I am very glad to hear that you have had such an excellent holiday in Switzerland, and brought home four or five more mountain scalps to your Cumberland wigwam. But it's rather sad that the little storm that was brewing at S. Peter's before you left should have burst in thunder and lightning during your absence. Knowing both Merridew and Rogers, I quite agree with you that it was probably inevitable, and may ultimately tend to a clearer atmosphere. Meanwhile however the little community makes war from opposite camps, and there is a great deal of unnecessary bitterness in their tactics that seems likely to increase when Rogers comes back from London. And, as you say, it's all rather sad and sordid, and only humorous because the parish

is so small and the whole storm contained, as it were, in one of its afternoon teacups. But then most parishes are comparatively small, and we all have to live in one or other of them, and storms in teacups are apt to be just as devastating as any other kind of storm—even more so perhaps, because it's so much easier on these occasions to insist upon recommending one's own particular infusion of tannin, than to insert instead an unobtrusive drop or two of the calming milk of human kindness. Whereas cyclones have a habit of setting us shoulder to shoulder, by virtue of the unanimous discovery that they rather suddenly engender of the extraordinary unimportance of our differences.

So on the whole I'm with you in preferring cyclones, although at first I was rather inclined to disagree with your assertion that this little flare-up between Rogers and your new vicar was merely a somewhat exaggerated instance of the general underlying hostility that seems to exist between Medicine and the Church.

I was for pointing out to you, with some vigour, the fact that we both have friends, not a few, in the consulting-room and cloth respectively, to whom we can talk with a complete frankness, and in the assurance of a reciprocated understanding.

And yet, on second thoughts, I am reluctantly sure that you are right, and that, speaking in very general terms, there does exist some such feeling as you have named—less hostility, perhaps, than a decently veiled distrust. It's a little hard to see why this should be the case. For there would appear superficially to be at least a hundred reasons why the precisely opposite should be true. Perhaps the foundation of it is historical. Centuries enough have not yet rolled away since medicine came out of the side of priestcraft; so that on the one hand there is still an occasional smarting of the old wound, and on the other a little over-insistence, perhaps, upon a complete and rather superior liberty—tradition still looming somewhat largely in the education of the young clergyman, and reverence being not, perhaps, a particularly prominent feature in the training of his medical brother. In any case, there it is; and though I think that Rogers has been wrong, or at any rate tactless, in his opposition to the extra services that Merridew wishes to hold in the cottage hospital, it seems to me that your two protagonists are very typical of all that is best (and possibly least reconcilable) on either side. For on the one hand you have Merridew, ardent, sincere, sacerdotal, and very

nearly young enough to account for, though not of course to justify, Rogers's rudeness in referring to him as "the boy from Cuddesdon." And on the other, you have Rogers, equally genuine, generous, uncompromising, and almost fiercely insistent in his demand for intellectual honesty. Indeed I think his rather truculent materialism is far more an expression of this desire than an exact creed of his personal belief. And both men, it seems to me, are so obviously the logical products of their respective upbringings.

Of Merridew's I can only speak of course as an outsider. His father, whom I knew very slightly, was himself a clergyman of the old High Church type, moderately wealthy, refined to the uttermost, acutely sensitive, artistic, yet as rigid in his standards as any Cromwellian Ironside. He was happily married, and his home—and young Merridew's—was, almost necessarily, like himself. Merridew was the only child, and when his father died, while he was still at Lancing, it was only natural that he should resolve to enter the Church, and that his mother should henceforth devote herself almost entirely to his welfare and to the furtherance of these boyish resolutions. Leaving Lancing, he went up to his father's old college at Cambridge, commended to his tutors,

and known to his fellow-undergraduates, from the outset, as a candidate for Holy Orders. And here—again as a perfectly accepted consequence—he took his degree in classics, and dabbled a little in history. He was not unpopular. His ardour, never awkward, procured him many friends and indeed followers among like-minded youths with a similar future in front of them; and, being adequately athletic, he was on friendly, if not intimate, terms with a good many others. At twenty-two or so he left Cambridge for Cuddesdon, and at twenty-four he obtained a curacy in Hoxton, where he overworked himself for four years. He was then, I think, an assistant priest at a fashionable church in Kensington, until he was presented by one of his uncles with the living of S. Peter's. Those are the external facts, and, as a guesser from the opposite camp, I may very likely go wrong in estimating their inner significances. But it seems to me—and in talking with Merridew I am always conscious of this—that as the inevitable result of this training he has been surrounded by a kind of protective aura, now almost impenetrable, that has interposed itself, as it were, between himself, as an anointed priest, and the great tides of actual life that go surging about him. Little by little it

was created for him by his parents. The vicissitudes of school life made him cling to it only the more firmly. Cambridge, and the conspiracy of silence that, to a lesser extent, surrounds the embryo and younger clergy as certainly as it does their sisters at home, merely strengthened it fourfold; so that when he left Cuddesdon there it was complete—his lifebelt for the conflicting seas of reality—and not only about his waist, but also to a large extent encircling his intellect. For if you examine his education you will find, I think, that never in all that time was he encouraged, for himself and by himself, to discover, to classify, to co-relate, one single naked fact of real existence. Science was then, and has always been, in its inward sense, a thing unknown to him. Of the living stuff of humanity he was given not the smallest primary notion. And his observation of it since has been that of a man who has never been equipped with the first unprejudiced principles of observation at all. Of heredity and psychology he knows not a line. And of their results in actual character and conduct he can perceive, as a rule, only as much as the normal man will reveal to the present type of normal parson—while even of that he has never been given the wherewithal to judge.

Rogers, on the other hand, was the son of a small Northampton milliner. At the age of fourteen he ran away to sea, where he served for four years in all sorts of ships, in all sorts of capacities. It was on one of these that some rough and ready, but skilful, surgery, by which a young ship's doctor removed some broken bone from the brain of a comrade who had fallen from the rigging, first fired him with the desire to be a surgeon. He returned home to find his father dead and his mother in straitened circumstances. He got work in a boot factory, and studied at night schools for his preliminary examination. Having passed this, he went back to sea for a year, and then, coming up to London, he managed to attend at hospital by day, while he kept himself as dispenser, bottle-washer, and general handy man to a dispensing practitioner in his spare hours.

By this means, and with the aid of a scholarship or two, he obtained his diplomas, and started a cash surgery near Waterloo. Five years later he was a Fellow of the College of Surgeons, and in another three had become a member of his hospital staff. For a year or so he found it pretty hard to make both ends meet behind his modest plate (one of five) upon a front door in Harley

Street. But then the tide began to turn. A brilliant paper or two marked him out as a coming man. A new and admirable method of performing a certain cerebral operation became associated with his name. And in ten years' time he had become perhaps the foremost brain surgeon in London. Twelve years after this he lost a hand, in consequence of a post-mortem infection, but retired a wealthy man, though at first a rather disconsolate one. For a time his love of the sea reasserted itself, and he travelled. Then, as you know, he found a retreat that suited him on the shores of Cumberland, where he has built, endowed, and kept lavishly up-to-date the little cottage hospital about which your teacup storm is raging.

You may tell me, perhaps, that both Rogers and Merridew are extreme instances. But if they are, it is in degree only and not in kind. For behind Rogers I can see a large and quickly growing army of thinking men and women, risen like him from what are called the masses, vigorous of mind and hard of muscle, men accustomed to deal with life at first hand, trained to observe, quick to deduct, unhampered, if perhaps a little too unmoved by tradition, state-makers, explorers, and men withal not impervious to, but on

the contrary almost passionately eager for the truth.

And behind Merridew I can see many, if not most, of his brethren, men of fine instincts and real devotedness—narrow-minded in none but the most literal sense, and in that merely because of the school that has moulded them—men who would cheerfully give all that they possess to be able to influence in any substantial degree the great world's dreamers and doers. And behind them again I can see their Church.

. . . . . .

Curiously enough, we have just been discussing something of all this upon Carthew's Thames-side lawn. We had crossed the river in the morning, and walked up, about a couple of miles, to a neighbouring village church. And now, as I write to you in the boat under the willows, they seem to me—the temple and its service—to have been almost tragically symbolic. The village itself, on the outskirts of Reading, consists of a rustic core, about which time and circumstance have wrapped several red-brick layers, the innermost containing workers from the various shops and factories of the neighbouring town, together with a sprinkling of day-labourers in the country

round; and the outer accommodating some superior clerks and their families, a few of the more substantial Reading tradesmen, and the inevitable retired colonel.

Most of these, as we passed upon our way, were smoking over the Sunday papers in their front gardens, or preparing for a morning to be spent upon the river; and the church was far from their midst, a mile in fact beyond their extremest outskirts. Moreover the day was hot, and the road to it dusty.

The building itself was neither old nor new, and we were shown into a pew beneath a large stained-glass window that almost immediately began, in spite of myself, to monopolise my attention. The congregation consisted, of course, mainly of women. ("It will be the same in the Hereafter," my Aunt Josephine once assured me when commenting upon the same phenomenon.) But there were about thirty men present, for the most part gnarled and sunburnt sons of the field, in uncomfortable, ready-made suits—men, as I guessed, in whose veins there still ran something of the older homage once shared by parson and squire. What was this particular parson going to give them, I wondered, as mental and moral food for the week's sustenance? His delivery of

the prayers and lessons was not very promising. It was not that he had any physical impediment in his speech. It was merely that he had never been taught to produce his sounds effectively, and that Oxford and his clubs had successfully schooled him into eliminating any tincture of emotion from their quality. But he might still, of course, have a message in waiting for us from the pulpit.

He preached upon the value of communicating before breakfast; and, as far as I could see, his remarks upon the subject were received, especially by the male portion of his congregation, with the same kind of curious, impassive gusto that had been noticeable in their delivery of the responses and the hymns. I remember a verse of one of these, and am quoting it exactly:

> Whatever, Lord, we lend to Thee
> Repaid a thousandfold will be;
> *Then* gladly will we give to Thee,
> Who givest all.

Could they have known what they were singing? Had their vicar read these lines before he gave them out? Let us hope not.

But, as I said, it was the stained-glass window that dominated me, and seemed to contain in

itself an epitome—yet not quite that, perhaps—of sermon and service and hymn, and the system that had made their survival possible in twentieth-century England. And yet, let me first put down that through it came light, real if distorted, and distilled, but how faintly, from the true arch of the outside heaven. And let me not forget this as I go on to remember its eight divisions, containing each a worshipping and apparently musical young woman, arrayed as no being has ever been arrayed, and regarding with upturned eyes—well, fortunately the artist had stopped short there, though merely, one fears, from want of space. I have called these maidens musical for the rather inadequate reason that in the hands of each were instruments by and through which sounds might conceivably be produced. But at the nature of these one could, alas, guess only too readily. Even in the grasp of experts one would have been justly dubious about the capabilities of those two-stringed violins, that one-keyed portable organ, those twin-trumpets with a common mouthpiece. And imagination reeled before their combined contemplation in the hands of these anæmic and self-evident amateurs. Nor could one turn from the subject, and find consolation in its colour or history. The

window was not forty years old, and the colour was but a ghost of what colour might be.

The whole window indeed was but a ghost—a ghost, manufactured at the thirtieth hand, of the mediæval work of some laborious but crude designer. And what, one wondered, could be even its pretended message to the full-blooded, restless, and instructed generation of to-day? Could these sallow-cheeked saints, these obviously unhealthy, ill-nourished, incapable young women, tell anything worth the hearing upon any single plane of thought or conduct to the men and women of 1910? Could they indeed preach any other possible sermon than to cry out to all would-be healthy people to flee away from them into the outer sunshine? Were they even justified as reflections, infinitely remote, of the pale Galilean of Gautier and Swinburne? And was there in fact ever a pale Galilean, the least of Whose doctrines they could ever imaginably have embodied? Was that sturdy, sun-browned Youth, with His carpenter's wrists and His physical endurance, with His undreamed spiritual forces and His splendid sanity in their control, with the glory of His emancipating conceptions and His divine simplicity in their exposition—was He ever such as to be thus pallidly worshipped

save in the twilight imageries of earlier centuries and the resentful poetry of rebellious thinkers? And I couldn't help wondering if my stained-glass window had perhaps cast its spell not only upon the aisles, but the authority of the Church that had set it up.

Only a year or two ago, for instance, I remember being assured by a youthful priest from Cambridge, who had scarcely ever stirred beyond his East End settlement, that, while he would refrain from setting a limit to God's mercy, no man could really be considered safe who had not made verbal confession of his sins to himself or one of his brothers. And only last week, upon the beach at Swanage, I heard another young clergyman, of a rather more so-called evangelical way of thinking, most positively assuring a ring of little children that the Devil was even then whispering in their ears what a good time he would like to give them. No wonder that the Carthews and the Rogers' stand aside, and wait impatiently for the coming of the New Word or of the Old one as it was. And no wonder that men and women, more really religious now, perhaps, than ever in history, look on at it all rather dubiously in a healthy hesitation, or turn frankly away to the tennis-lawn and river.

I have been watching them all the afternoon plying their oars here upon the Thames—strong and ruddy, keen-faced artisans from Reading, actresses from town, barristers, doctors, men of leisure, and men of affairs. And now, as I write, they are plying still, while across the fields comes the ineffectual call of the various ecclesiastical bells. By some they are not even heard, I suppose. They are singing choruses from "Our Miss Gibbs." To others they are just decorative in the region of river sounds, as the loosestrife and charlock in that of its colours. To a few they must even be merely sad. They might mean—they once have meant—so much to their country's seething life. And now they would seem to contain almost less significance than the gramophone in the steam-launch round the corner.

A few moments ago the Bishop, Carthew's newly-acquired brother-in-law, was leaning forward in his chair.

"If you knew," he said, "the real agony with which the Church has to face these problems."

Carthew nodded.

"Yes," he said slowly, "parturition's always painful—especially to the elderly—but the price for shirking it——"

"Is sterility," said the Bishop. "I know. But we don't want your pity. We want your help."

Carthew knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Then first," he said, "you must get rid of those lifebelts, where the race goes past them, and teach your clergy to swim. And then you must keep 'em swimming. And you must see that they swim first. Don't stultify their efforts by askin' 'em to square impossible traditions with new truths, or mediæval ethics with essential Christianity. Don't call 'em unsound because they have inklings inside 'em that Revelation didn't cease with St. John or interpretation with the Epistle to the Hebrews. Let 'em have Visions of their own. Tell 'em to go out, and make discoveries. Let 'em dare to be simple—really simple, that is. And trust God and human kindness to do the rest."

I don't think that he was speaking lightly, but the Bishop looked at him for a moment rather closely.

"You're a believer?" he said. "You don't mind my asking?"

"Not a bit," said Carthew. "I'm a believer. And what's more, I'm a believer in an organised, visible Church, not because it's vital, but because

it's expedient. Only its stained-glass windows, if they *must* be stained, should contain blacksmiths and boxers and wireless telegraphists, with some bank clerks and a bus driver, and of course some children," Mrs. Carthew had just brought out the twins, "for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Your affect. cousin,

PETER HARDING.

P.S.—Rogers is coming to dinner with us, as you suggested, before he goes back to Cumberland.

XXV

To Hugh Pontrex, Villa Rosa, Mentone.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
October 3, 1910.

MY DEAR HUGH,

When you write and ask me to tell you what books I read during my illness I can see an ancient accusation of yours peering at me behind the question—as though you had visibly added that, except when indisposed, I never read books at all. And if it weren't that I too find other people's reading so interesting, though less informing perhaps than their pictures, I might possibly stand upon my dignity, and decline to supply you with an answer. And in any case, now that I come to reflect a little, this will be rather a difficult thing to do. For having got me at a disadvantage, you see, I could no longer pick and choose, as is my wont when the health within me is rude and exacting. I could no longer demand haughtily of a book that it must make me read it, or remain within its covers for ever unread. My defences were down,

and I had perforce to roll over, hands up, for anything in the shape of book with which Accident and Mudie had happened to endow my house. And as a result I read half a dozen novels that, as the Americans say, left me cold, although I must needs give them the credit of having whiled away the time. Moreover, before dismissing them thus unkindly, I must remember that they were each the work of somebody's hand and brain, and the hard work too—at any rate so far as the hand was concerned—as anyone who has tried to put eighty thousand words of even unimaginative English upon paper would surely bear witness. Some of it too, one could see, was the rather tired work of minds that should really have been (perhaps only too willingly) lying fallow of production. And I think that I noticed this particularly in an altogether unimportant little volume called "Daisy's Aunt" by Mr. E. F. Benson, that may well stand for a sorrowful example. It's true that it was merely a two-shilling story; but even so, it was surely an unworthy one. And yet, I suppose, there *is* a public that likes to devour these descriptions of very ordinary London drawing-rooms and very usual Thames-side bungalows—that would fain listen to even the weariest repetitions of the

somewhat annoying slang of the "oh you heavenly person" type that for the moment is being affected by Mr. Benson's "quite nice people." And having thus found, or created, such a public, and designed the precise bait that it requires, I suppose that one is justified in hooking, as often as may be, one's share of their two-shilling pieces. But alas for the artist in Mr. Benson, in whose books there have been passages good enough of their kind to have made, perhaps, three or four pieces of real literature that few, I suppose, would have bought, but that some, at any rate, would have liked to keep upon their shelves. And yet again, who is to say that Mr. Benson (as representing not a few) has not after all chosen his better way? For if his popularity has been costly, it is at any rate of a clean and healthy sort, and one that may well, perhaps, be substituting itself for vogues unworthier and less wholesome.

They form an interesting study, these three brothers, not merely in heredity of talent, but because, as it seems to me, they stand very high in that small but growing band of really able writers, who possess also the knack of a popular appeal. The sons of a religious, scholarly, and discreet father, who himself had the power of attracting

both attention and success, these qualities, with no suspicion of a more wayward genius, have descended upon them in very generous measure. The social sense, the faculty of choosing the right friends, and a gift for getting them on paper; the high purpose, clerically moulded; the gentle inward warring of trained intellect and instinctive orthodoxy; to each has fallen a share of his father's mantle, wherewith to make himself a garment. And the mental pabulum that they provide is just what is wanted by a large number of active, intelligent men and women to whom genius is at all times unsympathetic; and by the yet greater company—including most of us, I suppose—to whom its strongest appeal is a matter of mood and place. Every generation seems to provide itself with such writers, and as a rule rewards them well; and while, no doubt, it is genius alone that survives, with a light that can never remain hidden, the others, by their more instant and transient appeal, do yeoman work, and are gathered honourably to their fathers. For we may not always be tuned to the tang of Stevenson or the burr of Dr. John Brown. But we are seldom incapable of sitting with enjoyment at some College Window, or allowing the lesser voices

to prepare us for those that are mightier than they.

And never, perhaps, has a generation possessed so many of these. Never certainly has their level of eloquence been so high. Hichens and Locke and Anthony Hope, Phillpotts, Marriott, Munro, and Wells, with Hewlett and de Morgan a little nearer, perhaps, to the stars, and a score of others close upon their heels—how sound and various is their artistry, and how consistent, as a whole, is the quality of their output. For this, one thinks, must be the besetting danger of all these skilled professionals—to avoid, on the one hand, the Scylla of over-repetition (to which most of the monthly magazines were long ago safely anchored) and on the other, the more dangerous Charybdis of a too venturesome novelty. Upon the first (and still confining oneself to the more considerable writers) Mr. Benson, the essayist, for example, would seem, more nearly than many, to be in danger of foundering. While upon the second I can think of Conan Doyle as having bumped as badly as most writers of an equal eminence. For while there is no man who can spin a better yarn for a dull journey (even if he has never given us a Brushwood Boy), his particular talent is about as at home among

the delicate domesticities of his "Duet with an Occasional Chorus" as would be some genial pugilist with the "Pot-pourri of a Surrey Garden." And yet, while one could pile up examples of sad wreckage upon both these rocks, the wonder, after all, is that there is really so little of it.

Mr. Benson, no doubt, will put up his helm in time; and Sir Arthur has been wise enough, as far as I know, to avoid any further emulation of Mrs. Gaskell and Miss Mitford. But it is, perhaps, to Mrs. HumphryWard that one naturally seems to turn for a demonstration of the completely median course—so rigidly median indeed, in its lofty mediocrity, that I am sometimes at a loss to account for her very great popularity even among (as the critics have called it) the circulating-library public. For though she has a gift, and a very considerable one, for bringing together the materials—a little machine-made, perhaps—of dramatic incident, one may search her books in vain for a single thrill that they have produced; while of humour they contain not a semblance. Indeed they form, as it seems to me, a long series of admirably well-laid fires, for which only the matches are wanting. As Dr. Brown would have said, she is the Maker, not the Mother, of her

books. And I think hers must be the twentieth-century triumph of the college-bred lady inspector.

It's strange how increasingly one misses, when it is absent, this underlying sense of humour; so much so indeed that one perceives it more and more to be a *sine qua non* of all towering and durable achievement. Given Meredith's humour, how Hardy, with his first-hand observation, his extraordinary detachment, and the beautiful lucidity of his English, would have loomed above the creator of Sir Willoughby. With humour for its lightning, how Tess would have stricken us to the heart. And how poor a substitute for it is irony, howsoever its subjects may deserve it. To withstand the years it must, no doubt, surround itself with the stronger qualities—depth and simplicity and desire—or Barrie, least of the Immortals, would be among their giants; and Jacobs would be knocking at their door. But that Olympus demands it let all testify who have tried to love Sordello, or watched Jude fade ever deeper into his obscurity, or read again, a generation later, the rhapsodies of Inglesant and Elsmere. There are a few exceptions of course, chiefly, I think, in the sphere of the short story, the mere *conte*, and among the poets, of whom perhaps Wordsworth is the one

that springs most readily to the mind. By the way, I saw a discussion (a rather unkindly one) in one of the magazines, a year or two ago, as to the worst line in reputable poetry, and I am rather afraid that last Sunday I discovered it, and that Wordsworth must be regarded as its sponsor. Here it is, and one grain of humour would surely have made it impossible.

> Spade! with which Wilkinson has tilled his land.

And yet he has written a sonnet or two, and at least one ode, that are as immortal, I suppose, as anything in letters.

But I don't seem to have told you very much about my bedside books. And the truth of it is that "Daisy's Aunt" is the only title that I can remember, though it may conveniently be stretched, perhaps, to embrace them all. For it concluded, if I remember rightly, with the matrimony of four persons; and the others also are now a blur to me of ultimate marriages—marriages between pathological pianists and high-born, introspective damsels; and marriages between athletic young gentlemen, good at puncture-mending, and the distressed maidens whose tyres had become deflated.

Of the books, on the other hand, that have

made me read them—rare and beloved visitors—there have been fewer this year than usual, though it is I, and not the books, that must bear the chief blame for this. The two latest of these, separated by an interval of months, and both, I believe, already elderly as the lives of modern novels go, are "The Cliff End" and "Captain Margaret." The first of these delighted me from cover to cover, in spite of some exaggerations of character-drawing and dialogue; and I reverently bow my head to its author as having made himself at a bound the laureate, not only of the bath-tub, but of that peculiarly distressing variety of it that is very wide and shallow, with a dimple in it that cracks when you stand upon it, and a capacity for water that no housemaid has ever satisfied. It is perhaps too late for the nature of this vessel to change. But never more, with that rosy vision of sponging maidenhood before my eyes, shall I regard it as anything but blessed.

So it's a book for which I should like to prophesy life, though with less certainty, perhaps, than "Captain Margaret," upon the deck of his *Broken Heart*, carries the very germ of it in his delicate hands. For to his eldorado of dreams we have all of us, at one time or another, turned

our eyes. And in his schooner might have sailed any Quixote of history, lucky indeed to find a Cammock for his navigator.

And yet who am I to be thus prophesying so boldly? For the third of my books has been a collection of Oscar Wilde's contributions to the "Pall Mall Gazette," full of such forecasts, and written, too, by a practised hand. Has one half of them been verified? I think not. And yet I suspect that few critics could more equably confront a reprinting of their twenty-year-old opinions. Looking through this book, I read, for example, whole pages devoted to the novel of Miss So-and-so whom one would have supposed, in the eighties, to have been an emerging George Eliot. And how desperately must the praise have fired her to further efforts. Yet what, in 1910, has become of poor Miss So-and-so; and where are those great works that were so certainly to be? There is the writer himself too, so young then, with his brilliant flippancies—his impeachment of the British Cook, for instance, with her passion for combining pepper and gravy and calling it soup, and her inveterate habit of sending up bread poultices with pheasant—and all his promises of grace.

So, upon the whole, it's a sad book; and here,

for a brisker comment upon all that I have been writing, comes a volume of American essays that has just been lent to Esther, wherein I am positively assured that the volumes of Mrs. Humphry Ward are quite dangerously immoral! While there, upon a chair, lies a novel, "Mr. Meeson's Will," that Rupert Morris has just recommended to me as being his beau-ideal of a really outstanding story. So let me lie low. I have spoken out my literary heart to you, as any man, on occasion, should have the courage to do. But now let me lie low. For by what standards am I judging, after all, who have only spent an hour in Chicago, and never a moment east of Suez?

You will remember Morris, whom you met here during his last visit to England. And as you remember him so he is, with perhaps an added grey hair or two in his moustache, and a few more upon his temples. For the rest, he is just as lean and brown and boyish as he has always been, and with a touch of deference in his first greetings to Esther and me that has survived from the school-days, when he was a comparative nipper, and that he will carry, I suppose, since he is English of the English, until common earth shall level us all. He was looking, when he first came in, rather hesitating and ill

at ease, with his title, as it were, tucked awkwardly under his arm. Much like this I have seen him at school, on some Old Boys' Day, coming back to the pavilion after making his century, with an uncomfortable shove at his cap, and something about the bowlers having been "dead off their luck."

Finding us alone however, and not disposed to worry him, he cheered up amazingly, and was soon chattering to us briskly about his various adventures. His personal part in these would seem as a rule to have been conspicuous by its dullness; but the adventures themselves were well worth hearing about. And it was only quite accidentally, as he was leaving for Stoke, that we discovered him to be seconded for some special duties in the colonies—"imperial defence, don't you know, and all that sort of thing; rather an interesting job."

And did I tell you, by the way, that the Poles have bequeathed us their baby during their visit to Italy? Esther has just brought her in, and she is staring at me now with the solemnest eyes in creation—little pools of Siloam, but with the angels just going to be busy. I must go to them, and be healed.

Ever yrs.,
P. H.

XXVI

To John Summers, M.B., c/o the Rev. W. B. La Touche, High Barn, Winchester,

91B Harley Street, W.,
October 18, 1910.

My dear Jack,

I have just received your letter, and also the accountant's statement as regards Dr. Singleton's books; and I have instructed the solicitors to sell out enough of your stock to buy the quarter-share of his practice upon which you and he have agreed. If you can manage to obtain with it an equal proportion of his skill, kindliness, and cheerful adequacy you may be quite sure that the advantage of the bargain will not be altogether upon his side. For though books are important of course, if the man who keeps them is sound you needn't trouble your head so very much about them. And Singleton is sound through and through—not exactly one of those brilliant men, perhaps, of whom, as operating surgeons, Sir Frederick Treves has declared him-

self to be so justly timid, but what is far better, one of those level-headed, big-hearted general practitioners, tender of hand and essentially careful, in whose professional history mistakes have been, and will continue to be, practically unknown.

Moreover he was never, even as a student, one of those people who have set out to purchase skill in their own profession by the sacrifice of very nearly every other human interest. *Nihil humani a me alienum puto* has been his own as well as his hospital's motto. And you must some day get him to tell you the story of how an odd little nsight into esoteric Buddhism that he was once curious enough to obtain became the means of saving the life, to say nothing of the sanity, of one of the most valuable men of our time. That late cut of his, too, is still well worth seeing; and there are not many of my friends who can go straighter to the heart of a book or a picture—that is, if the book or the picture has a heart to be got to.

He may not be able to excise a Gasserian ganglion, or know very much about the researches of Calmette or von Pircquet. But he knows precisely when to call in the men who do. And he's just the sort of assistant with whom they

feel safe in setting out to work. While, on the other hand, upon a hundred points—little every-day problems of medical practice, unclassified ailments that have never got into the text-books or been dignified with a Latin name, doubtful beginnings of more definite illnesses, their home-treatment, and the adequate settlement of the domestic problems that they involve—there isn't a man in Harley Street who could give a more valuable opinion. And he has performed a tracheotomy with his pocket-knife and a hair-pin, five miles from anywhere, in the heart of the Hampshire downs.

Such men are not only the pillars of our profession, but its topmost pinnacles, even if the wreaths and the knighthoods but seldom come their way. I am saying all this because I think that I can detect in your letter, and certainly in the newer generation of qualifying students, a kind of reluctance about going into general practice, as if this were in a way an admission of failure, a sort of *dernier ressort*. Whereas of course there is no point of view from which such a way of looking at it is at all justifiable. General practice is at least as difficult, if it is to be carried on well and successfully, as any special practice can be, and probably more so; for the G.P.

has to live continually, as it were, with the results of his handiwork. He is always liable to meet his failures round the next corner; and his mistakes may quite easily rent the pew behind him in the parish church. The consultant, on the other hand, comes into the family life from afar, and returns again, an hour or two later, to the seclusion of his private fastness. He has brought down his little bit of extra technical skill or knowledge. He has used it for good or ill. And the results do not follow him, save indirectly, and at a very comfortable distance. But the G.P. who has taken upon himself the responsibility of calling him in must needs still bear upon his shoulders not only the anxiety that heralds ultimate success, but a large share of the possible obloquy that may follow failure.

Moreover, in all the hundred extraneous interests that are involved, his advice becomes of paramount importance. This would be the best room for the patient from the point of view of quietness and aspect. But that, on the other hand, is the room that he has been used to. His favourite books and pictures surround him there in the old accustomed order. Does the doctor think it better for him to be moved?

His wife, his mother, or his sister are anxious to nurse him. Are they strong enough or skilful enough? What is the doctor's opinion on this point? Here is a telephone message from the office. A disturbing point has arisen in the conduct of a great business, and should be dealt with promptly. Are we to worry the patient with it now, or postpone the settlement, with the possibilities of greater anxieties later on? Let us wait, at any rate, until the doctor comes.

And from this household he has to drive home by a private school where lies some boy with a cheerful countenance and a suspicious red rash on his chest. It would never do to create a false alarm. But, on the other hand, it would be more than disastrous to let the origin of some sweeping epidemic go free for convenience' sake. And here is a servant-maid in the surgery with a throat that looks as diphtheritic as a throat can well be; and she comes from a dairy farm that supplies half the town with milk, under the eyes of a government inspector; while the rector's wife, nervous, and uncomfortably near forty, is expecting her first, long-looked-for baby some time this afternoon.

It may take a good man to remove successfully

an adherent appendix or an obscure tumour of the brain, or to diagnose some out-of-the-way lesion of a heart valve. But such a man, after all, has spent the greater portion of his professional life in dealing with no other subjects but these. And it must surely require at least an equal equipment, after its own kind, to deal wisely and rapidly with such variously conflicting problems as I have just been describing.

You are probably becoming a little bored by these commonplace remarks of mine. But they are the sort of truism that will generally bear an occasional reconsideration. And if I have a very private opinion, to which you cannot subscribe, that the really able general practitioner is perhaps the very best man in our ranks bar none, I am quite willing to concede this extra superiority if you will grant him at least an equal eminence to that of Sir Grosvenor le Draughte, as Mr. Russell has called him in one of his recent books.

So go into your practice with a good heart. Your experience as a locum in Bristol and Shropshire will have prepared you for any little mortifications that may be in waiting during your first few months. You will be used to the

disheartening fall of the countenance that greets the junior partner when his senior was expected. And you will accept with a grave countenance and an inward chuckle your knowledge of the extremely frank criticism that is likely to herald and succeed your first few visits. Even now there's a letter upon my desk from a disrespectful young lady who shall be nameless. A new curate has made his initial appearance in an Eastbourne drawing-room. "He shook hands just like a baby," she writes, "and he stopped to tea, and he sprawled all over the table, and he has quite nice eyes, but his mouth is just like cook's when she's having one of her windy spasums." And if sixteen can rise to heights like this, what about eighteen and twenty and twenty-two? Nor are curates, alas, the only legitimate prey. I wonder if there's a girls' school in your practice?

You may lament too, for a little while perhaps, the slow dawning of confidence in your new patients. But before very long you may even be rather overwhelmed (quite privately of course) by the freedom and completeness with which it is accorded you. And above all things, be just your natural self in dealing with them, forgetting, if you can, that you have ever even

heard of such an attribute as a good bedside manner.

This reminds me that only last week, in a railway carriage, I overheard two young ladies discussing a very sympathetic physician well known to us both. One of them was wondering why he had always been so successful. "Oh, that," said the other cheerfully, "is because he's so frightfully good at comforting the relatives —*afterwards*, you know."

If your news must be bad, tell it soberly and promptly. It's seldom—very seldom—wise to conceal it for some dubious temporary benefit. And if you are in doubt about any of their maladies let them know it quite frankly, explaining to them in language suited to their degree of education and intelligence exactly why this should be the case.

There's been a good deal written lately about the personal factor in treatment, the Psychology of the Physician, and the mental therapeutics at his command. And I even saw a letter in the "Lancet," a few weeks ago, urging that the practical application of Personality in the sick-room should form one of the recognised subjects of the medical curriculum. But in the first place, I'm exceedingly doubtful if the modesty of our

profession is so excessively marked as to demand for its correction a course of instruction in the conscious prescribing of its own personality. And in the second, I fail to see how this latter could ever be done without, by the very act, considerably altering that uncertain quantity, at any rate so far as its victim was concerned. And what would one's *ego* be like, I wonder, after ten years' conscientious labour? So I shouldn't worry too much about your personality if I were you. It will be a good thing, no doubt, to get all you can into it by encouraging such tentacles as it may put forth to the sun and the breeze. But what other people are to get out of it is a matter with which you may quite properly, I think, be too busy to concern yourself.

While I'm still in the pulpit, let me recommend you to husband your energies. Don't play tennis all the afternoon (even with Amaryllis) if you have been up all night. Go to sleep in the hammock, instead, over a book or a paper or a letter from Uncle Peter. And don't forget sometimes to say your prayers. For whatever may be one's private notions as to their ultimate Destination; whether one affects a belief in some beneficent Overlord, once incarnate; or

regards God as the ever-growing sum of all higher human volitions; or, remembering this infinitesimal particle of earth in the greatness of the universe, considers such a conception to be inadequate; or admits only some possible Starting-point, a kind of Divine Convenience upon which to found theories; or has never thought about the matter at all—it's always a gracious and comforting act to remove one's moral hat, as it were (even if reverence goes no further) to Something at any rate bigger than most of us. While even on the very chilliest of auto-suggestion grounds there is still a word to be said for it as a vehicle wherein to despatch one's extra troubles to some handy mental cemetery. For prayer, whether we look upon it as sacred or superstitious, must still, as the hymn says, be the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed. And occasional expression is about as valuable a prelude to the acquiring of knowledge as any that are going.

So I may as well tell you at once that I know nothing whatever about motor-cars, and therefore find the last half of your letter entirely unintelligible. But I gather that the one you mean to purchase combines speed, silence, and freedom from odour in a quite unusual degree. Some day,

no doubt, I shall be sponging upon you for a lesson in driving it—or him—or do you call the thing her ?

Yr. affect. uncle,

PETER HARDING.

XXVII

To Miss Sarah Harding, The Orphanage, Little Blessington, Dorset.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
November 7, 1910.

MY DEAR SALLY,

This is going to be a short letter because the news that it contains is probably speeding to you already—from Esther, to whom its greatness is not unmixed with tears; and from Molly, to whom its joy is of the eternal gold. Ten days ago she came back to us from Stoke, where, as she told us, she had been having a good time, but seemed now to have fulfilled her little contract. For the house-party had broken up: Horace had long ago made a late return to Cambridge; Carthew was in the Temple, and Pole in Fleet Street; Hilary and Norah were off to Spain; and the one or two extra guns, just leisurely shooting men, had betaken themselves, at any rate superficially regretful, to other people's houses. Lady Wroxton was better—very nearly her old self, and for the moment wrapped up,

heart and soul, in her nephew Rupert. It had been a pleasant visit. She kissed us very tenderly. And now it was high time that she was back again among her girls at Hoxton.

Two days later came a wire from Rupert asking if he might spend a night with us on his way to Yorkshire. And in the evening he duly arrived. Nobody else was dining with us that night, and our little party at the table was perhaps quieter than usual. After dinner we were going to smoke our pipes in the library with Esther and Molly, when Rupert drew me aside and asked me to take him into the consulting-room.

"I want you just to run over me," he said, with his eyes on a dangling stethoscope, "to run over me rather thoroughly."

I glanced at him anxiously. But in his evening clothes he seemed even lither and more bronzed than ever.

"Feeling bad anywhere?" I inquired. But he shook his head.

"Rather fit," he admitted, as he took off his coat and waistcoat. And as I suspected, I could find nothing wrong with him. On the contrary, he appeared to be in the very pink of condition, for all his tropical sojournings.

"Good," he said; "and, as a matter of fact, I saw Manson this morning, and West this afternoon, and they both told me the same thing."

I began to laugh at him, though he was speaking very seriously. "You're surely not becoming a hypochondriac?" I asked.

"No," he said gravely; "I don't think so. But I'm forty-seven, you see. And I want to get married."

I was, perhaps, rather taken aback at this, though I scarcely knew why. And he himself appeared to consider the idea as savouring somewhat of presumption. For he blushed a little as he slowly collected his clothes. Somehow we had neither of us thought of him as being a marrying man. Then, as he began to dress himself again, I congratulated him, and asked him if the lady was known to me. He hesitated for a moment, and then smiled.

"Yes, I think she is," he said; "though I doubt if you'd consider me much of a husband for her."

He filled his pipe thoughtfully.

"For though in some ways she seems to me to be rather old for her years—old-fashioned,

you know, and womanly, and all that—she's really rather young."

He seemed to consider this a difficulty. Then he looked at me with a kind of deprecating straightness.

"You'd be giving her," he said, "to a fellow who's old enough to be her father."

I suppose that I looked a little surprised.

"Yes, I do," he said humbly; "I mean Molly."

We sucked our pipes in silence for a minute or two, looking at one another through the tobacco smoke. Then I asked him if he had ever pointed out to Molly her striking lack of modernity. He shook his head.

"Hadn't the pluck," he confessed; "but it's so obvious, isn't it?"

He glanced at me anxiously.

"But you mustn't think I'm against it," he said. "It's so rare nowadays. And I think it's beautiful; and anyway, it's just what I've been wanting all my life."

"You'll let me talk to Esther?" I asked presently.

"I should like to talk to her myself," he answered, "only I'm such a fool at these things."

He lit another match.

"Look here," he went on, "I don't want you to tell me what you both think for a week—till I come back from Yorkshire. I'm too old for her, I know. But I seem to be pretty sound, and I—well, dash it all, Peter, you know her better than I do, although you—d'you know, by the way, that you rather put me off her in that last letter of yours?"

"Did I?" I asked. "Perhaps that was because I don't really know her so well."

"Well, first," he said, "there was that Lynn affair, of course. But that's dead, isn't it?"

"Quite," I told him; "and they've both gone out of mourning."

"And then," he went on, "you made me think of a rather up-to-date young woman, quite nice, of course," he looked at me apologetically, "but perhaps just a little bit self-complacent. Whereas I found in her, instead, everything that I've always worshipped most, you know—from rather a long way off."

. . . . . .

That was a week ago. And since he left, as you will imagine, both Esther and I have done a good deal of thinking. For on the one side we

couldn't help feeling the absurdity of regarding Rupert as a son-in-law. And on the other we should be giving our daughter—or rather watching her go—into the hands of one of our oldest friends. Given love too, how well should they be mated; both so strong, but he so abidingly simple, so unchallenged by surrounding mysteries, and she so eager, so delicately tuned to each passing subtlety of thought.

Characteristically enough, he had neither told us, before he went, how clearly he had shown Molly his feelings, nor asked us to discuss with her, or to withhold, his announcement to ourselves. And so we said nothing to her about it. But just now, as we were expecting his arrival, I discovered, I think, that our desire for her had been fulfilled. For with a shyness bringing back to me a little girl that I had forgotten, she had perched herself on the arm of my chair; so that when his voice was in the hall there wasn't very far to bend.

"You told me to wait for Heaven, you know," she reminded me. And her eyes confessed that it was standing at the door.

Your affect. brother,

PETER.

P.S.—I can see you pursing those wise lips of yours, and muttering that Heaven has been a little sudden. But I believe that there are precedents for this.

XXVIII

To Miss Josephine Summers, The Cottage, Potham, Beds.

91B Harley Street, W.,
November 26, 1910.

My dear Aunt Josephine,

We shall be very disappointed if you don't come to Molly's wedding, although it is to be rather a quiet one, or at any rate as quiet as we can manage to keep it—not because we are anything but desirous that as many people as are kind enough to do so may rejoice with us over the occasion; but because, from Molly downwards, we have a temperamental shrinking from crowded churches, pavement druggets, hired exotics, and paid choir-boys. And you mustn't worry because your favourite porter has been transferred to Leeds, and therefore won't be able to look after your luggage at St. Pancras. Because one of us will be sure to meet you with the carriage, and escort both you and it quite safely to Harley Street.

I have received your cheque, and will buy the little medicine-chest for Rupert to-morrow. As you say, it's most important that the bread-winner should try to keep himself in as good a state of health as possible, even if he is so liable, as Rupert is, to be suddenly shot. And we all think the old bracelet that you have sent to Molly very beautiful. Both of them will so much want to thank you personally for your gifts that you must really make up your mind, I think, to take the risks of the journey (the most recent statistics show these to be quite small) and stay with us here for a couple of nights from December 6th.

Yr. affect. nephew,

PETER HARDING.

XXIX

To the Rev. Bruce Harding, S. Peter's College, Morecambe Bay.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
December 2, 1910.

MY DEAR BRUCE,

It was very good of you to enclose a note in your letter to Molly, and the more so because I have an uncomfortable suspicion that I may have wounded you a little when I wrote to you last. If only we could use colours now, to express our deeper attitude on these occasions—as some of your fellow-clergy wear stoles at certain seasons—with what pleasant impunity could we write to one another in yellow, or purple, or red, leaving black for the editor of "The Times," or the plumber whose bill we're disputing. But, alas, even our lightest thoughts must needs go forth clad like mutes at a funeral, and dependent upon those who meet them to detect their forlorn humanity. And so if I have talked, as the outsider that I am, too harshly of things that are dear to you, you

must forgive me even as Merridew has forgiven Rogers.

For you know—why should I tell you ?—that it was no Word from on high that my puny humanity was attempting to challenge, but only the chains (as they seem to me) of Its ecclesiastical exposition ; as though man had been made for the Church, and not the Church for man. And yet even thus one can only bow before its achievement. For to be able, as the miner of whom we read the other day, to sing "Lead, kindly Light" through the foul air of some blocked-up coal-pit is better than to have all knowledge—and an abundant justification of any creed that makes it possible.

"Thou wouldst not seek Me," says the Saviour in the "Mirror of Jesus," "if thou hadst not found Me."

Do you know the quotation ? I came upon it by chance the other day as repeated by Bourget in a book that I happened to be reading. And it seems to me to contain very simply—if only we might give it something more than an academic consent—just the one conception that is needed for the true and permanent sweetening of all our religious relationships. For they *are* seeking, these pig-headed people who annoy us so much—

I think that, nowadays, we most of us can admit as much as that. Methodist, Sacerdotalist, Hyde-Park Agnostic, Christian Socialist, Roman Modernist, Traditional Romanist, High, Low, Broad, Middle, Open, Closed (I wonder if God laughs sometimes at our resounding definitions), or Free Lance—we cannot help pitying them, of course, according to our several lights; but in so far as their sincerity is manifest, we do behold in them the signs of a mistaken search.

And yet, by that very fact, have they not really found? Not our particular little glimpse of the Almighty and the Eternal, but some other little glimpse—something, at any rate, that is evidently making them strive for more; and something that they, like we, are desperately anxious to share. Or why these dusts of conflict?

And yet, perhaps, the dusts are inevitable, after all—the surest sign that the Building grows beneath its million workers, and that the mallets and chisels are being busy against that great day of Affirmation when the Temple shall stand complete at the meeting-place of all our roads.

And meanwhile Molly and Rupert, at any rate, are feeling very happy—with a proud humility,

carefully concealed. His years have seldom weighed heavily on Molly's future husband, though as a matter of bald fact he is Mr. Pickwick's senior. And lately he has been dropping them by handfuls. Molly, however, must have picked some of them up, I fancy, and is wearing them with an appropriate dignity.

Your affect. cousin,

PETER HARDING.

XXX

To Hugh Pontrex, Villa Rosa, Mentone.

91B HARLEY STREET, W.,
December 25, 1910,
10.30 p.m.

MY DEAR HUGH,

This seems an odd sort of time at which to begin a letter—even to you. But this has been an odd sort of Christmas, a kind of aftermath, as far as its festivities have been concerned, of those demanded by Molly's marriage. The two water-colours that you sent them, by the way, were both lovely, quite in your happiest vein; and I am sorry that at present they have no permanent wall to hang them on. But Rupert's colonial tour, upon which they had to start early last week, will scarcely be finished, I suppose, for twelve months; and even then their place of habitation seems likely to be very movable. So, upon the whole, we have been a quiet little party, or as quiet, at any rate, as Claire and Tom will allow; and we decided to spend the afternoon at the hospital, which is *en fête* for some

twenty-four hours, at the price, possibly, of a few subsequent temperatures, but to the immediate benediction of all concerned.

Have you ever been to the hospital? I think not. And I daren't attempt to describe it to you, chiefly, I suppose, on account of the natural reticence, the *mauvaise honte*, or the golden silence—I leave you to select—with which most men avoid such subjects as their wives, their souls, and their *alma mater;* but secondarily because, by the time my letter reached you, the description would most probably have ceased to be true. It would have added a storey, or sprouted a wing. Let me content myself therefore with pointing out to you those two boys standing rather awkwardly in one corner of the entrance-hall—the left-hand corner between the cloak-room and the porter's desk. Both of them have only just left school. The shiny-haired one, with the crimson tie, and the gold buttons on his waistcoat, and the creases on his rather striking trousers, was at one of our older foundations. The other, with yesterday's collar round his neck, and a stain or two of nitric acid upon his sleeves, has just won an entrance scholarship from a private school at Camberwell. The second is the shyer of the two perhaps, in spite of his ardent

Fabianism and his bitter independence of revealed religion. But both are a little nervous in that they are only in their first year, and still, academically speaking, confined to the study of the dog-fish in a remoter corner of the college. They are feeling rather young, in fact, though the hospital's name is on their visiting cards—something like new boys again, at the bottom of the first form.

Three Christmases from now, however, and they will be sauntering here very much at their ease, waiting about with their house-physicians for the two o'clock arrival of their chiefs from Harley Street. The gold buttons will have disappeared, I think, by then, and the trousers will be modester in hue; while on the other hand that collar will be above suspicion, and you might search in vain for a trace of red corrosive. Both, too, will be dangling stethoscopes, and would like, if they were quite certain of the chairman, to be smoking a Virginian cigarette. In other words, they have deserted the college for the "house." They have become critics of the nursing staff, and their talk—not on Christmas Day, of course—is of *râles* and *rhonchi* and the merits of their respective H.P.'s. There are some of them standing about in the hall

as our party dismounts from the carriage. But the majority are already in their favourite wards, whose walls they have been helping to decorate. Far removed are they from the Sawyers of yesterday, though at times they grow merry with wine. For the demands of examiners have become annually more stringent; their hospital duties are arduous; and hard work, as everybody knows, is the next-door neighbour to virtue.

Give them but three Christmases more, and they will be even as this white-coated and dignified young man whom Horace and I are watching as he deals with the patients in the receiving-room. For these will drift in from the streets and tenements, whether or no the day be a Festival, and partly, perhaps, with an eye to possible good cheer. We wait a little, as he stands there by the pillar, a curious contrast, with his fresh face and athletic figure, to the slouching fleshiness of these big navvies and the stunted urbanity of the rest.

Behind him stand a couple of dressers, fresh from the college, willing, but still perhaps a little bewildered, and to whom this all-knowing and self-possessed young surgeon is something of a god. His treatment is rapid—it has to be—

for he is here primarily to sort out the cases that come crowding in their daily hundreds. But he must never make a mistake—a grave one, that is. And the remembrance of this has taught him—no easy matter—to know real illness when he sees it with a pretty high degree of certainty. So the bad cases he sets on one side. For if possible they must be admitted; and at any rate they must be seen by the house-surgeon or house-physician on duty. While as for the rest, they may be given at once the necessary pill, or a desirable draught from that decorated urn in the corner—there's a certain irony in that particular wreath of holly—or despatched, with out-patient cards, to appropriate special departments.

And all this time there is flowing from him to the dressers a little stream of wounds to be stitched, torn scalps to be cleaned, and sprains and strains to be temporarily bandaged. Odder things too may be demanding their youthful attention. Here, for instance, is a genial but, alas, beery Irishwoman of vast *embonpoint*, whose wedding-ring has been jammed into her finger, and must at all costs be removed. Alcoholic invocations are breathed into the dresser's ear as he files patiently at this brass emblem of

married unity. Sure, darlin', she tells him, if she could only be rid of her ould man as aisy, she'd be another woman to-morrer, she would. While here, sitting next her, is a dark-eyed twelve-year-old, holding out a pathetic little toe that has been stamped upon by a passing dray-horse. It is attached to a very grimy foot that was not, one fears, the only inhabitant of the stocking that contained it. And the dresser is not sure if the bone is broken. She has the countenance of a tear-stained Madonna; but her language, when he twists her toe, becomes positively lurid. The other women titter or are shocked, the Sister rebukes her, and young white-coat is called up for reference. He likes the little girl, and gives her some chocolate, whereupon she stifles half her sobs and most of her profanity. Yes, it's a fracture all right. Does the dresser know how to put on a poroplastic splint? The dresser looks a little uncertain. So white-coat gives him a swiftly helping hand, and within five minutes is removing a decayed semitic molar that has been giving its owner *schmerz* indescribable. Accompanying this gentleman are his two sisters, a married brother with his wife and family, and an elderly uncle, all of whom wail incontinently to the general discomfort. Glancing over his

shoulder, young white-coat sends briefly for a porter, who courteously removes them; and is only just in time, having extracted the tooth successfully, to avoid the happy sufferer's embraces. He has never hurried; and yet by the time that we have made our round of the dressing-rooms the benches are empty, and he has disappeared to his pipe and his arm-chair. Can you believe that but four years ago he was throwing chalk about the dissecting-room, and stamping uproariously during lectures?

This wonder has my hospital performed. And what am I to tell you of the Sister who has witnessed it—whose shrewd eyes have beheld so many dressers emerging rawly from the college or from Cambridge, becoming in due time even as our white-clad friend, and passing hence, as he will pass, into the staid gravity of the family doctor?

There's a time—fortunately brief—in the career of the just-qualified student when he is a little inclined to assert his professional supremacy. How tenderly she watches him through it; and how, telling him all things, she apparently tells him nothing! I wouldn't like to say how many years she has stood there, or what sights, humorous, tragic, unpaintably indecent, she has

witnessed in all that time. And you could certainly never guess them for yourself. Let me only say then that her wisdom is more than the wisdom of many physicians, and that no gentler fingers have touched the seamy side of life.

And yet, I suppose, she was once a little girl, shinning up the orchard trees for the apples at the top. And she can still, I believe, drop a sentimental tear or two upon the last page of a novel. So can this be yet another miracle that my hospital has wrought? Dear me—and we have got no further than the receiving-room, and scarcely even thought about the patients.

Sometimes I wonder if the people whose pennies are invited to keep us for a second ever realise the full significance of the instant that they make their own. Not always, I think, for even I, who am in the hospital three times a week, only get an occasional vision of it—chiefly on such days as these, when one may travel its wards at large, unforbidden by professional etiquette. Do they know, for example, that under the roof of the out-patients' department there are two small boys—open-mouthed little snorers of yesterday, sprawling about on the pavement

inviting trouble—whose tonsils during that moment have been successfully removed from them? And can they perceive, in the same measure of time, a dozen blocked-up ears and noses being skilfully examined by electrical illumination? Do they realise that, simultaneously with all this, eight short-sighted persons are being tested for spectacles, and two more being operated upon for squint; that three men with diseased skins are being prescribed for in another part of the building, and that four women who were being consumed with lupus are now being cured with light; that a poor servant-girl is under gas while her yet poorer teeth are being removed, and that three others are being fitted with nerveless new ones; that a little damsel with a dislocated hip is having it put in plaster; that an elderly and rheumatic cab-driver is being helped with radiant heat; and that some four hundred men and women of all descriptions are waiting their turn for treatment? My numbers are conservative; but, even so, does the gentleman on the underground railway platform realise (to be merely sordid) that during his second some five hundred pounds' worth of free operations are in progress? Does he visualise the resultant satisfaction in all

those squalid little homes, the domestic relief, the returning efficiency, the rolled-away anxiety, the dawning happiness? And does he remember that he has as yet peeped into but one department of the great hospital that he is supporting?

But really, on a Christmas Day one shouldn't be thinking about these things; and you must put them down to an elderly garrulity, or as being, if you will, in the nature of a half-sorrowful farewell. For by next Christmas, alas, my wards will have ceased to know me. The twenty years' span allotted to me will have come to its close; and even to-day, at a corner of the corridor, I overheard a hazarded guess at my successor.

So after a long pilgrimage through gay and chattering wards—they were all gay this afternoon, only you mustn't look, perhaps, at those quiet corners—we at last found Esther and her party in the gayest of them all. I will call it this, as being a very complete disguise if you should ever quote me to the Sister of another. And here a troupe of residents was delivering a little series of songs and dances, to the complete delight of some forty patients and a background of visitors and nurses. Its members were particularly hilarious. I fancy indeed that they

must have primed themselves with a little previous champagne—a very little, and you must remember that at least two of them had been up for most of the night. But nobody noticed this; and Claire, at any rate, was very thoroughly taken by storm.

"Won't they come back presently?" she asked.

But the Sister shook her head. If Claire wanted to see them again she must go off to some other ward. I saw her turn to Tom.

"Shall we?" she said, and they slipped away together. But before they went I heard her calling his particular attention to one of the players, "the second from the left," she whispered, "the awfully handsome one"—a new note for Claire? Yes, just a little new.

And so we left it at last, driving out into the street through a small crowd of eager, white-faced children, for some of whom, no doubt, its walls were as the walls of Paradise. It was quite dark, with a blur of rain upon the carriage windows; and for a minute or two the hospital, with its long rows of lighted wards, towered dimly upon our left.

"Just like a great big liner," said Claire, who had been down to Southampton when Molly and Rupert sailed. And so indeed one could imagine

ti—lifting its strong sides above all these crowded roof-tops, with unshaken bows, and Hope upon the bridge, and Comfort, at least, to minister in its cabins.

"And yet there's something awful in it too," said Jeanie Graham.

"Chiefly," explained Horace philosophically, "because we're going home ourselves to an excellent Christmas dinner."

"And happen to be feeling rather well," said Esther.

"And partly, I suppose," added Jeanie, "because just now we're looking at it from the outside."

"And a little bit," I guessed, "because it stands, in a sense, for Knowledge with a big K. And there are times when we're all rather afraid of that—even when it wants to do us good."

"But we run to it in the end," smiled Jeanie.

Let me introduce you to her as she sits opposite to me in the brougham—or to so much of her as is not obscured by Claire, who is dividing her weight between Horace and his wife-apparent. Strictly speaking, I suppose, she is scarcely to be described as pretty. Her cheek-bones are the least shade too high, and her eyebrows just a trifle too level. Here and there too

her skin, still clinging to its Highland brown, is powdered with tiny freckles; and though her nose is straight enough, a purist might consider her mouth too big, and her chin perhaps a little too firm—but very pleasantly so. Her hair is dark and wavy, and in its natural setting—a grey tam-'o-shanter, I think, and the tail of a Scotch mist—might well contain the deep, divine, dark dayshine of the poet. And indeed I have been assured that it does. I have left her eyes to the last, because at present she is standing away from them a little. Regarded as mere windows to her mind they are well opened, clear, and grey. But Horace, who has seen their owner leaning out of them, could no doubt describe them better. And we think that he's a fortunate young man.

Our only other guest was Wensley, dragged reluctantly from Chelsea. His year has had some of its usual disappointments. His big work wasn't finished in time for the Academy, and is still in his studio. But though the Chantrey trustees passed over the very beautiful bronze that he did send, he has sold this to the National Gallery at Copenhagen for six hundred pounds, and has spent, in consequence, a fortnight at Whitby—his first holiday, I believe, in three years, since his invalid aunt and sister absorb most of his usual earnings.

He always looks odd and uncomfortable in evening dress. But our very informal table generally sets him at his ease. And he is an extreme favourite with both Tom and Claire. To-night he remembered one of Tom's songs, and persuaded him, after dinner, to deliver it—with a little hesitation at first (for the poor boy has still got some scruples, I think), but ultimately to his saving grace. He left us at ten o'clock, for the invalids' sake, by which time Tom and Claire announced themselves to be feeling rather sleepy, without, as I observed, any notable protest from Jeanie and Horace. So they have both gone upstairs to bed; or at least I had thought so. But a tentative whisper at my door-handle has aroused my suspicions. I am busy writing to Mr. Pontrex, so that I shall be sure not to hear anything; and slowly the crack widens between the door-edge and the architrave. Across the blackness disclosed, flashes the gleam of a white-frocked arm, like a turning trout in a pool; and presently a brown hand, desperately silent, begins feeling for my key. I look at it apprehensively (for I have become a little nervous on this point lately) and am happily relieved to find it ringless. I must be very quick.

. . . . . .

And yet, as you will have noticed, even Claire is growing up, still faithful to a more boisterous March, but now and then holding out her finger-tips to May. She reposes, as you may remember, in the little room next to ours. And yesterday morning Esther called me from my shaving-glass. For she had opened the door between, to discover that Claire had flown. Whither we could guess very easily, as she was even then hammering Tom with her pillow. But there, balanced face downwards on the edge of the bolster, lay a momentarily forgotten photograph. Esther touched it with a smile.

"D'you think we ought to?" she asked. And then she drew back. But at that moment a rather more vehement bump than its predecessors shook the wall and floor so thoroughly that the photo slid down upon the sheets, poised itself for a second upon its edge, and then dropped over, to reveal the very debonair figure of Mr. George Alexander as the gallant Rudolf Rassendyll. We looked at one another, and laughed—but only a little. And then Esther restored the picture to its resting-place.

Some day we shall meet him in the Park, and Claire will behold a very genial, middle-aged gentleman, a little inclined to be plump. But

he won't be Rudolf Rassendyll. And what will happen to his likeness ?

. . . . . .

" She'll put it in her bottom drawer," smiles Esther, leaning over me as I write, " and it'll become part of somebody else."

She drops a kiss upon my occiput.

" And now you must come to bed," she adds, " or perhaps to-morrow morning you'll be tired."

And by this, of course, she means "cross," though possibly, by some blesséd dispensation, she imagines that she doesn't. For long (as I am minded to tell you, Hugh Pontrex), long before she's married, a woman has made a garment for the man who is to wed her—a beautiful and rather princely garment, and fortunately a bigger one than is usually required. Because then, you see, she has only to take a tuck in it—and forget about it—and there's her man clad in his coat, just as she had always dreamed that he would come to her. Most women, I'm afraid, have to deepen this tuck until there's no more stuff that they can turn. And by that time, perhaps, we have begun to suspect that there has been some tampering with our property.

" D'you mean to say," we inquire bitterly, " that we've grown out of it already ? "

And then it is that they must needs explain to us, with dewy eyes and hands upon our shoulders, how it's only the same dear garment still—*three times as thick.*

"What nonsense," says Esther above my shoulder.

"The garment?" I ask.

"No, the—the tuck."

But she looks a little conscious.

Ever yours,

P. H.

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WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON, LTD.
PLYMOUTH